



BURTON STREET FOLKS

ANNA POTTER WRIGHT





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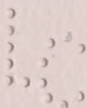
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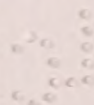
BY
ANNA POTTER WRIGHT
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To
Dr. Carleton Wright,
My
Brother

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CHAPTER I

The Theft

A PARTICULARLY hard and disappointing day was drawing to a close. Billy Bruce had braved the storm since early morning, vainly endeavoring to find something to do that a few pennies at least might be earned. With a feeling of disappointment he now wended his way back to Burton street and up the long flights of stairs leading to the room he had left at day-break with an empty stomach but a hopeful heart.

"I'm so tired and so hungry!" he wailed, throwing his emaciated little body in a disconsolate heap upon his couch. "Ain't you got nothing at all, mamma, for me to eat, not even a crust of bread? I didn't have no luck today, and I tried hard. You and papa has took everything for booze and now there ain't one cent left."

"What?" almost incoherently mumbled the mother, who was only a wreck of her former self.

"I say ain't you got nothing for me to eat? I'm 'most starved."

"What makes you drink, anyhow?" presently he asked, going to her side, the clouds growing darker on his sullen little face, but there was no response. She had fallen into a heavy drunken sleep from which he knew by sad experience she would not waken for several

hours. The room which gave them shelter was indeed a cheerless place for a lad of ten years. The battered furniture, which mutely spoke of other days, was covered with dust; the unpolished stove emitted no heat, for the fire long since had died out; the floor was unswept and the table was piled high with unwashed dishes.

The mellow light of the waning winter day made a brave effort to peep through the smoky window to bear its message of hope, but it seemed only to irritate Billy.

"I wish the sun would never, never shine again," he said fiercely, shaking a little blue fist toward the window, "'cause—'cause—" "Yes," he added meditatively, as though more convinced than ever of the sun's unpardonable audacity, "I wish it wouldn't, for it has no business to," and then this child, young in years but old in sorrow, began trying to devise some plan whereby he might relieve the cruel pangs of hunger, looking the while through the dingy window at the still more dingy buildings. The last time he was on trial for stealing bread, he was warned that another offense would bring down upon him severe punishment. Hence it was expedient that this campaign be conducted with the utmost caution. Being behind prison bars was worse than his present miserable condition in one respect only, for there he could not have his much prized liberty. All things considered, he preferred that even to the certainty of being provided daily with something to eat.

It was a sad, calloused, hungry and daring boy who started forth in the gathering darkness. He was weak and faint, and but for the desired end in view, could scarcely have endured the keen, cutting wind following in the wake of the receding storm. Pausing for a moment, he looked back at the building which sheltered his mother, but the feeling of irresolution soon gave way to one of firm determination.

He walked rapidly for several blocks toward a bakery where the daring deed was to be performed, but to reach it he had to pass O'Conner's saloon. Listening to the voices within, he recognized among them his father's.

He was inclined to rush in and coax his father home, but knowing that the attempt probably would be futile, and shrinking from O'Conner's coarse jests, in desperation he started on for the bakery. Reaching it at last, for some time he looked through the window at the rows of delicious bread, meat, cakes and pies, then spying, coming around the corner, one of the ever-present policemen, he trudged on. His courage was almost failing, but the thought of going back to the cheerless home while he was so very, very hungry was unendurable.

The policeman, he observed, had disappeared, a number of people were entering the bakery at once, so now was the opportunity. He would slip quietly in behind them, snatch a loaf of bread from the window, and escape before there was any probability of being detected. The plan was well-formed and worked perfectly. He was darting through the doorway, his mouth already watering in anticipation of the coming feast, when, without warning, he found himself face to face with the policeman.

"Not so fast," said he. "I am onto my job with you street kiddies and hid near by to be handy. Oh, no, now, don't struggle to get away, for it won't do you any good. You'd better take a short walk with me to a nice big brick building I know of, eh? Gee whiz! Crying? Cut it out! Anyone brave enough to slip into a bakery and steal a loaf of bread ought not to cry; it doesn't correspond."

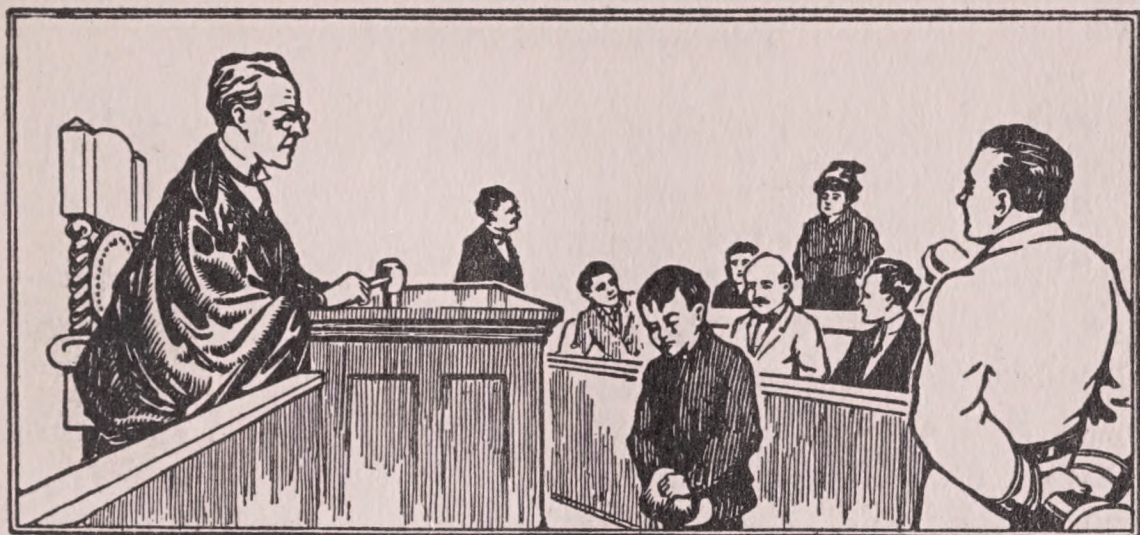
"I'll bet you'd steal a loaf of bread, and cry too, if you was as awful hungry as I am," sobbed the boy. "I

ain't had nothing to eat today, and 'most nothing yesterday and the day before."

"Oh, yes, I know by heart the story you fellows always tell, come 'long now without any fuss about it."

Seeing that his efforts were futile, the boy submitted in silence. Later on Billy stretched his tired body out on the bench in his cell, but for some time sleep refused to come.

Presently, however, having planned the many terrible things he would do to all saloon-keepers in general and to O'Conner in particular, if only a man, he grew quiet and knew nothing more till morning.



CHAPTER II

The Trial

GUILTY, or not guilty?" was the question put to Billy the next morning in a solemnly sonorous voice.

"Guilty," he replied with downcast head, trying at the same time to push the toe of his disreputable shoe through the floor.

The trial was short, and the fateful moment had arrived when the sentence was to be pronounced.

There was a stir in the rear of the room, and a woman of goodly proportions, who a few moments before had slipped quietly in, arose to her feet.

"I beg your pardon, Jedge, for interuptin'," she began, "but I've got somethin' to say."

"But, madam, I can permit no such irregularity. We shall proceed without further interruption."

"I just must tell about that child, for it may make a difference in the sentence."

"Be most hasty then."

"Sure, your honor, for your time's precious and so's mine. I've only very lately become a Christian, and there ain't no end to the work I want to do before I die."

"Madam! Make your story about this boy as brief as

possible. Do you understand? This is a very unusual proceeding, indeed."

"I understand, Jedge.

"Well, as I was about to say, I've known Billy for—it's goin' on five years, and he was mighty little and pinched-up-like for not havin' enough to eat.

"I live at 115 Burton street, and Billy and his folks moved in. He was then—well, let me see; five from ten leaves five—so he was about five, and a prettier baby you never see, but frail—"

"I care nothing for details."

"For what?"

"Oh, go on and get through. If you were not a woman, I would have you immediately ejected from the courtroom."

"Well, then that boy's pa is a college man, yes, sir, he is. He told Mike Flannigan all about it, and Mike told his wife, and she told Mis' Browning what's dead now, and she told me, so you see it come pretty straight-like."

"Very, indeed!" ironically and with more than necessary emphasis.

"Well, Mr. Bruce—"

"Who?"

"Mr. Bruce. Don't I talk loud enough?" going a few steps nearer and raising her voice. "Mr. Bruce when he got out of college made lots of money, but commenced drinkin', and got to goin' to the bad faster and faster. He married a mighty pretty little society girl that didn't know nothin' about work, or how to do anything more'n look pretty. When their money was all gone and he lost his job, they both got discouraged-like, and she took to drinkin' too more'n was fashionable. They left their nice home for cheap rooms, then soon had to get out, and kept a-gittin' till they got where they be now on Burton street.

"Mis' Bruce comes from grand folks he says, but when she married him, they wouldn't have nothin' more to do with her, 'cause he was a little too gay to suit 'em."

"What is Mrs. Bruce's first name?" asked the judge with so much interest that a look of surprise crossed the faces of all present.

"Marjorie."

"Marjorie!" then recollecting himself, immediately retreated behind his usual dignity.

"You must like that name."

"Never mind whether I like it or not, but proceed. Is this their only child?"

"Yes, and anyone can tell by lookin' at him he has good blood in him, too.

"One time his pa knocked him down stairs, for Billy was cryin' for somethin' to eat. Mr. Bruce sobered up then in a hurry, and paced the hall the whole night long, moanin' and carryin' on and pleadin' like somebody was with him to break the cruel chains that was holdin' him down. He works when he ain't drunk, but spends it mostly at the saloon, and I believe the whole family would be starved and froze if it wasn't for Billy. He does anything he can get to do, then gives his pa or ma the money. After doin' all that, he has come to me many a time for somethin' to eat, and I wouldn't give him nothin', no, sir, I wouldn't. You see, Jedge, what kind of a woman I was before the Lord saved me—a meaner one never lived. I guess if He can save me, He can you, too."

At this a little laugh floated over the room; not really a coarse laugh, for something about the woman's intense earnestness prevented that. The eminent Judge Sommerville, present on this particular morning only that he might study at close range the class of criminals arraigned before a police court, was famed for his austerity, hence the amusement on the part of the interested auditors.

The judge with agitated face leaned forward and was about to speak, when the woman continued:

"And now for a bit of my personal history as it sort of fits in here, leadin' up to the point."

"That's the way I treated Billy, then after my man died, Grandpa Gray, my father-in-law, lived with me—Mis' Gray, that's my name if you want to know—and I scolded the poor old man more'n you can think of. Then Mis' Browning, she that lived across the hall from me, died, and I took her Rosa to keep a spell, and I abused that child somethin' awful. I left 'em for a couple of days and they run off, no wonder, to find the way to the beautiful land where Rosa's ma went. And they found it too, Jedge, for Jesus Christ is the way.

"Well, grandpa is dead now, and Dr. Dale, an awful rich man, has took Rosa. Esther Fairfax, whose pa is the big preacher, you know, and who helped Rosa and me and grandpa to become Christians, come after me to see grandpa before he died, for he was at her house. And the very last thing I done before goin' was to throw a piece of coal at Billy—I'm awfully sorry, Billy boy—then while I was away I found Jesus. When I come back last night Billy was gone, but, say, Jedge," and her voice trembled, "I found his ma drunk and 'most froze."

"Is the woman going to die, Mrs. Gray?" asked the judge in a subdued but excited voice.

"I think not, but you seem wonderful int'rested, even though you didn't want me to tell my story."

"My attitude in the matter is of no consequence to you; go on."

"Comin' down to business then, what about that there poor little fellow? If you must send anybody up, send me, for he ain't never had no chance yet, and let him go. He'll be good now, I know, but anyhow it wasn't real stealin', for he was starvin'."

For some time the judge studied frightened, surprised, trembling Billy without a word, his face flushing and paling by turns, as was that also of the youthful prisoner.

Apparently satisfied, at last he spoke with deliberation, seemingly more to himself than to the anxious intercessor: "There can be no mistake." And then to Mrs. Gray: "The prisoner is acquitted; take him back to his mother without delay."

"You say you live at 115 Burton street?"

"Yes, your honor."

"And that Mar—, or I should say, the Bruces live there too?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure your story is true?"

"Of course I am."

"And that her name really is Marjorie?"

"Yes, and quite a high soundin' name for Burton street, ain't it?—Marjorie Bruce."

"Is she well?"

"Generally speakin'. And her eyes for all the world look like yours."

"Do they?" but his aforesaid eyes saw nothing about him. They evidently were riveted upon scenes of other years.



CHAPTER III

"The Sweetest Story"

BILLY, promise me you won't be afraid of me no more," gasped Mrs. Gray between breaths, as she was climbing the steep, narrow stairs leading to her rooms. "You see I'm a Christian now, and that makes a heap of difference."

"I don't just know what bein' a Christian is," replied Billy, as they entered her room, "but something's sure happened. I don't feel one bit afraid of you, but what ever made you do it? Why, it ain't only a few days ago that you told on me to the cop for tryin' to steal some fruit, and here today you said you'd take my place if the judge would just let me go. Is that bein' a Christian?"

"Billy, I have an awful lot to tell you—the sweetest story you ever heard, too, but before I begin I must see if your ma wants anything."

Following Mrs. Gray into the room, he was speechless with amazement. The floor and windows were cleaned, the furniture dusted, the stove brightly polished and a fire cheerily burning. Mrs. Bruce, reclining upon a cot, was neatly clad in a soft red dress, but was too weak to talk. Tears gathered in her eyes, as she reached out a thin white hand for her boy.

"Gee! What's up?" he whispered, but for reply she pointed toward Mrs. Gray.

"I'm mighty glad to see you so pert, Mis' Bruce," said Mrs. Gray, with a smile. "It's best for you to keep quiet now, so if you don't want nothin', I'm goin' to take Billy home with me. Here, let me plump your pillow up a bit and smooth out this blanket. If you're well enough all three of you is comin' to my house for supper tonight. Now just turn over—there, that's right—and go to sleep, and when you wake up you'll feel better. Come on now, Billy boy, for I'm achin' to talk."

"Did you do that room?" asked Billy, seating himself by her stove.

"I'll explain after a while, honey."

"Is that bein' a Christian," he persisted, "to look after my ma that way?"

"Sure, and I wouldn't a-done it before I was a Christian. But you go to my other room and you'll find some things to put on. Land sakes, child, the sole is clean off of that there shoe, and your coat ain't a bit better'n paper. I wonder you ain't froze. Here's some warm water in this here pail, and here's some soap and a towel. Now you scrub good, and put them clothes on you'll find in there, and I'll get us somethin' to eat."

When Billy returned he was substantially clad from head to toe.

"Gee! Where did you get 'em, Mis' Gray, and the things for ma? I thought you was poor. Is this bein' a Christian?"

"I am poor, and I'll explain later. I know you must be mighty hungry, but you look fine in them clothes, I declare.

"Pitch right in now," as they sat down to the table, "and don't be backward one bit. Here, let me help you to some ham and eggs, and put some gravy on your biscuit while it's good and hot. And here's some pretty

red jelly I thought mebbe you'd like. Oh, take more'n that, that ain't half enough.

"Well, Billy, I don't know where to begin, honest I don't, there's that much to tell, but in the first place, I'm awful sorry I've been so mean to you."

"That's all right; you bet I don't care now," he replied, while at the same time an amazingly large piece of ham was disappearing.

"Rosa, that sweet lamb I had for a spell, you know her—"

"Yep."

"Well, she lives in one of them fine up-town houses now, and Dr. Dale, her new pa, took me all through it,—here, take another biscuit—and it's prettier'n anything I ever heard of. But that little lamb, she taught him how to love God, and now he's goin' to use his money helpin' the poor. He gave me fifty dollars—fifty dollars I say!—to use for other folks, so you see that's how I got the things. And he's goin' to give me money every month, if I spend it to suit him."

"Is that bein' a Christian—to make other folks happy?"

"No, just makin' other folks happy ain't bein' a Christian, but if you are one, it naturally follows you'll make other folks happy—the ham and eggs is right there handy, help yourself—you ought to be a Christian, Billy."

"But I don't know how. There ain't nobody to give me fifty dollars for bein' one."

"No, no, child, of course not. But you don't have to have money. All you need is Jesus. Did you ever hear about Him?"

"I've heard O'Conner say it when he was mad."

"Billy, the shame of it! Well, I'll have to go and see O'Conner."

"What," after an interval of silence, "you ain't

through, are you? Do make out your dinner," as Billy leaned back in his chair with a sigh of satisfaction. "Can't you eat one more biscuit with jelly on it?"

"No, I'm clear full, I say, but tell me about Jesus. Then I'll know what bein' a Christian means?"

"I hope so. We'll just set here by the table; it's real cozy-like for talkin'. I love the story. Esther Fairfax told me, and so did her pa, and he give me a Bible all marked, the particular verses, you know, so as I could learn it quick.

"Well, as I was beginnin', it happened a long time ago, the sweetest thing this poor old world ever saw. One night, in the little country of Judea away off across the ocean, some shepherds was watchin' their flocks, when all at once an angel come right down from heaven, but the shepherds was afraid of him. He said to them—well, let me read it so as to get it just right—

"'Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'

"Oh, Billy, wouldn't you like to have been there? I can just imagine how them shepherds looked standin' there by their flocks, with the glory of the angels shinin' right in their faces, and listenin' to the music almost without breathin'. Then, as the angels begun floatin' up a little higher and a little higher, and the music gettin' fainter and fainter, how they'd try to catch the very last look and sound, till finally they'd just be gazin' up into the starlit sky itself, wishin' they could see heaven's gates open when the angels swept through.

"Well, after that was all over, the shepherds went into Bethlehem, the town, to worship that blessed Baby. But, Billy, where do you suppose they found Him?"

"In a swell house like where Rosa lives, I 'spect."

"No, sir; oh, think of it! there weren't no room for them at the hotel, so this Baby was born in a manger. No room for Him! and there ain't never been over much room for Him in the world since, neither."

"Well, there was a wicked king heard about the Holy Child Jesus, and he had all the boy babies two years old and under killed."

"Did they get Him?"

"No, for an angel had warned Joseph to take his young wife Mary and the Child into another country."

"After while they moved to a town called Nazareth, and there they lived till Jesus was a man."

"Accordin' to the good Book, He lived at home till He was about thirty years old, workin' at the carpenter's trade."

"Like Mike Flannigan works? He's a carpenter."

"Yes, somethin' like it, I s'pose."

"Well, Billy, I can't tell you half that was crowded into the next three years till He went back to heaven, and if I could it would take more'n all day."

"But He chose twelve men to go with Him, disciples I believe they called 'em, and they traveled all over everywhere tellin' folks how to be saved, and doin' good. If anybody was sick all they had to do was to go to Jesus, and He'd lay His hands on 'em, or mebbe speak a word, and they'd get well immediately."

"Oh, He done so much, it can never be told. But don't you think lots of folks didn't like Him, but principally the men what thought they was smart and know'd it all."

"And Jesus was poorer than you and me, for He didn't have no place at all He could call His own to

lay down His tired, achin' head. But there was one family that loved Him very much. It was Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Well, Lazarus got sick and they sent for Jesus, but He didn't get there till after he was dead and buried."

"Oh, wasn't that too bad, when He might have saved him?"

"You wait, honey, and you'll see. Mary and Martha was feelin' awful when finally Jesus did come, but He just asked 'em where they had laid him. They went to the grave, a hole in the side of a hill, or somethin' like that, with a stone over it. Lots of folks went along, and Jesus told some of them to roll the stone away. Oh, His dear heart was breakin', and for more reasons'n one, and He cried. After the stone was away, He prayed and said real loud: 'Lazarus, come forth!' And, Billy, he did, and was exactly as much alive as you or me this minute. But think of it; it made them smart men mad, for they said the people would all follow Jesus instead of them, and that would hurt 'em like. So from that time on they tried to find some fault in Him, so as they could have Him killed."

"Killed!"

"Yes, killed, but you wait. They couldn't find no fault in Him—"

"Well, I think not."

"So they had to try somethin' else. One of these disciples wasn't what he pretended to be, and if you'll believe it, he promised for only a little money to betray Jesus into their hands."

"Gee, the mean man! That's meaner'n O'Conner."

"Yes, but you'll see how it come out. Jesus kept tellin' His disciples that He must die, but they didn't believe it. They all went to the city of Jerusalem to one of them big feasts, and Jesus took His disciples to an upstairs room where they had supper. Not because

they was hungry, but it was somethin' He wanted them to do after He was gone, so as they would think about Him, and this man that promised to betray Him,—Judas, I believe, was his name, left before they was through. Jesus knew what was goin' to happen, so the next few hours He spent in talkin' and prayin' so lovin'-like with His disciples, and He told 'em that some day He would come back.

"Mebbe it was about midnight when they all went to a garden where Jesus wanted to pray, and He felt so awful—worse'n anybody ever did before or since—that He sweat drops of blood, but, Billy, an angel come ag'in, and I'm glad. It was dark, and pretty soon some soldiers marched in, and Judas went up to Jesus and kissed Him, so as they'd know who He was, and they took Him off."

"What did the disciples let 'em for? Oh, if I only had been there!"

"They was scared and was cowards, Billy. Jesus had what they called a trial, but it wasn't no honest trial at all."

"Did He have to go before a judge?"

"A sort of one I s'pose you might call him."

"And there wasn't nobody to help Him like you did me?"

"No, Billy, not one."

"Not *one* of His disciples or the folks He cured?"

"No, not even one."

"But the judge didn't give Him no sentence nor nothing, did he?"

"I can hardly tell you, for it is so sad. The jedge didn't want to have nothin' to do with Him, so he sent Him to another jedge, and this one sent Him back, and all the time the crowds of people got madder and madder, sayin', 'Crucify Him!'"

"What is 'crucify'?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. But the jedge said he couldn't find nothin' wrong in Him, and wanted to let Him go. They hollered louder'n ever then to have Him crucified. Well, the jedge was sure he had had a real bright thought, and he'd fix 'em by askin' which he should release, Jesus or Barabbas, a dreadful wicked man they had shut up, and they was all afraid of him. He didn't think of their askin' for Barabbas, but they did."

"What, that bad man instead of Jesus that had helped 'em so?"

"Yes, Billy, but as I told you before, there has never been much room in this poor old lost world for God's Son that came to save it.

"Then the jedge let 'em have Him, and they dressed Him up like a king, and mocked Him, and spit on Him and—"

"Say, how could they?"

"Now calm yourself, for you must know it all, and the worst is to come. They put a crown of thorns on that tender brow, and whipped His poor back till it was all cut open."

"Oh, I don't want to hear any more."

"But you must, for *it was for you.*"

"For *me?*"

"Yes, I'll explain later. Then they led Him out and put a heavy cross—just like my fingers looks now—on His bleedin' back, but He couldn't carry it; it was too heavy for Him. When they got out to the hill, they laid the cross down and stretched His precious body upon it, nailin' fast them dear hands that had give the healin' touch to so many, and nailin' the feet fast too that had traveled so many weary miles to help others.

"Then they put the cross in a hole in the ground, just lettin' Him hang there till it killed Him."

"They didn't really *kill* Him, did they?"

"Yes, but wait, for, glory! He rose ag'in. That's

goin' ahead a little though, for I can't bear to see you feel so.

"After He was dead, there was a rich man come and got His body, and wrapped it in linen and laid it in a new tomb. Then some of them smart men that was to blame for it all remembered that Jesus said He would rise again the third day, so they put a guard 'round the grave. They said the disciples might come and steal the body and make folks believe He had risen. Early on Sunday mornin' a woman named Mary Magdalene come to the grave, and, Billy, the stone was rolled away and the body gone. After while she went ag'in and seen two angels. They asked her what was the matter, and she said they had taken away her Lord, and she didn't know where they had laid Him. Then she turned around and seen a man she thought was the gardener, and she asked him what he knew about it. He said, 'Mary,' oh so sweet and tender, different from what anybody else could say it, and then she knew it was Jesus, yes, Jesus, Billy, for He had risen from the dead! He stayed on earth forty days, then after that He went to heaven. And, oh, how the angels must have sung when He got back home ag'in!

"Now there's a verse that tells why Jesus done all this:

"'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.'

"That's it, Billy. We're all so wicked that He had to die for us, so as we could be saved."

"Did He come to take our place, just like you come to take my place this morning?"

"Yes, honey, only what I done was nothin'. Do you love Him now?"

"Love Him?—oh, Mis' Gray!"

"Do you believe on Him?"

"Yes, how could I help it?"

"Then you're a Christian, for that is all there is to it. Listen to this:

"'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' That is what it means to be a Christian—just believin' on Him. I think you understand now."

"I wish I could do somethin' for Him, Mis' Gray, to let Him know I thank Him for takin' my place."

"You can. As soon as I find a room, Dr. Dale is goin' to open up a mission, and he and Preacher Fairfax is goin' to do the preachin' when they can, and when they can't will send somebody else. Yes, you can help by askin' people to go, and then, for instance, Billy, if you sweep the stairs real clean, corners and all, 'cause you know He's lookin', it's workin' for Him as truly as preachin' is.

"And that reminds me, I was doin' for your ma 'most all night, then ag'in this mornin', so I didn't have no time to clean the stairs myself. If you'll do it, and do it good, I'll give you ten cents. But first you must run in and see how your ma's feelin', and I'll declare! I must get these here dishes washed up right away."



CHAPTER IV

"Too Late!"

MRS. Gray was swiftly walking about her room, making preparations for supper. After everything was done to her satisfaction, she donned her wraps and called to Billy that she was going to the flower stand near O'Conner's saloon.

"Well," she thought as she started, "I'm in time I guess."

"Shall I not deliver the goods, madam?" asked the grocerman after Mrs. Gray had made several purchases.

"No, thank you, sir; I can look after them myself."

Out of breath as usual from rapid walking, and relieving her arms of her numerous packages, she sat down with a sigh where she could see all passers-by. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes had rolled around, then with a look of relief she hastened to meet Mr. Bruce.

"I'm real glad to see you, and it's lucky-like too. I've got 'most more'n I can carry, and since we're goin' the same way, I s'pose you won't mind givin' me a lift."

"I'd be glad to help you certainly, Mrs. Gray, but unfortunately have a little matter of business to attend to before going home."

"Well, since you all are comin' to my house for sup-

per, I'll just go with you, if you don't object. I can't do nothin' more till you get there anyway."

"I'll have your packages delivered. You go on, then I'll come in a few minutes."

"No, thank you, you are awful kind indeed, but it'd cost money to do that, and that wouldn't pay. I guess I can make out to get 'em home myself," she added adroitly, "if you can't help me."

"Oh, well," impatiently, "come on. I'll defer my engagement."

"Thank you, thank you; you always was a gentleman."

While passing O'Conner's the odor of the liquor made him turn pale, he hesitated and was about to enter, when Mrs. Gray, apparently by accident, dropped her package of apples, scattering the contents over the walk. While gathering them up for her, the last atom of his manhood had an opportunity to assert itself, and that together with Mrs. Gray's casual remarks about Billy and his "little sick ma" tided him safely over the crisis.

"Hello there, Bruce," called O'Conner, who had been angrily watching the scene, "come in a minute."

"No, not this evening; I haven't time."

"O'Conner," almost shouted Mrs. Gray, stamping her foot emphatically, "ain't you satisfied just to let men walk into your death-trap when they want to, without you standin' at the door to bait 'em?"

"'Pon my word, old hag, who are you?" gasped the decidedly astonished saloon-keeper.

"Who am I? You'll find out, sir, just as soon as I start up my mission as close to your place of destruction as I can get a room."

"One of these detestable mission ranters! You'll not get a room in this neighborhood, on your life, if I have to rent every empty one myself.

"But say, Bruce, I think I'd let my rights as a free

man be imposed upon by such an old—," but the assailed pair had turned the corner and did not hear the vile oaths hurled after them.

In a few minutes more Mr. Bruce was kissing the wife and child whom he ardently loved, and vowing that henceforth for their sakes his life would be better. But his heart failed him as he remembered the many times the vow had been taken before, only to be broken in a few short hours.

"But, Marjorie, laddie, what is it?" he asked, looking from one to the other almost dreamily, as he began to take in the transformation of the room and of their personal appearance. "Tell me about it."

Marjorie for answer only sobbed, but Billy's irrepressible spirits were bubbling over.

"Dad, look, my coat and trousers have got pockets in 'em, more'n I ever had before in all my life.

"Mis' Gray did it, and I ain't afraid of her, or nothing any more. She gave me every single bit I could eat at noon, and, gee, that was a lot, for I was 'most starved last night, and got shut up again for stealin' bread. Didn't you miss me none?"

"No, Billy, I did not miss you, for I was too drunk. Oh, the brute that I am!—no longer a free man but a slave to the drink compounded in hell!"

"And, dad, Mis' Gray come and wanted the judge to let her take my place. Ain't she good? Then he let us both go."

"Did she say why she did that and all the rest?"

"Yes, it's because she's a Christian."

Billy talked on of the wonderful events of the day, dwelling longest in his innocent-ignorant way on the story of Jesus. His father, nervously caressing the eager little speaker, listened with intensest interest, till at last all about him was growing dark and unsteady, every

nerve in his body tingling. Oh, the burning thirst! He was on fire, he could not endure it!

Just at this moment Mrs. Gray entered the room, and in an instant comprehended Mr. Bruce's condition. Laying her hand upon his shoulder to arouse him, she cheerily said:

"Come to supper now, everything is ready. 'This cold weather gives a body a mighty good appetite.' But while so saying her heart was uttering the prayer: 'O God, in Jesus' name, let this strong coffee help to satisfy the awful thirst that's burnin' him up.'"

Two cups full of the steaming beverage were greedily swallowed, and then Mr. Bruce was himself for a while.

The well-cooked meal was enjoyed by all, if not served after the most approved fashion. The coarse white linen was spotlessly clean, and the carnations Mrs. Gray knew preached their silent sermon as Mrs. Bruce with tear-dimmed eyes cast many loving glances in their direction.

"Before coverin' up the table I'll just take out the flowers so as we can smell 'em, then we can have a little visit before you leave. Billy and I had a fine time at noon, didn't we?"

"You bet we did."

General topics were discussed at length, Mrs. Gray being at an utter loss to know how to reach her strange guests. Mr. Bruce's ghastly expression and shaking form filled her with apprehension. Had she been wise after all in keeping him from his evening drink? Was he going to be able to bear it? He had lived on stimulants so long that all true vitality seemed to have left him. Ought she to talk to him of Jesus who came to break Satan's power? Yes, she would, regardless of consequences, for this might be her only opportunity.

Soon at this rate he would be occupying a drunkard's grave. His mind was momentarily out of poise she knew, but then God had the power to send the message through the mist to his darkened soul.

While wondering how to begin, and pouring for Mr. Bruce another cup of coffee, she was relieved by his saying, although with much agitation:

"Mrs. Gray, I cannot find words with which to express to you my gratitude for saving my poor starving boy this morning, and for the transformation you have wrought in our miserable rooms. I am a wretch to allow my family to live in such squalor and to force my one child to steal bread. Hell will be too good a place for me, yes, too good. No, do not interrupt me, Mrs. Gray; what I say is true, and I am already more in hell than on God's lovely earth. I am wholly to blame," he continued more quietly, "for the downfall of my wife and myself. You know something of our history. Mrs. Bruce's father, and rightly so, objected to our marriage, for I was a wild young man. Notwithstanding his wishes we were married as soon as Marjorie became of age, and he has never spoken to us since, only to order us forever from his presence. At the time I held a good position in what is now the largest department store in the city, but I neglected my duties till I was discharged. Disappointment followed disappointment in quick succession after that, so in order to drown our sorrow and bitterness, we indulged more and more in the fateful cup. Now we are bound by chains which I fear cannot be broken. I should like to make one more attempt, then if that fails—well, suicide will end it all anyhow."

"Oh, Mr. Bruce, don't say that; you ain't fit to die, and suicide won't end it all. You'll find yourself in more trouble 'n ever you've had yet, if you rush off into God's presence without believin' on His Son."

"How do I know," he asked almost peevishly, "that God has a Son?"

"What? How do you know that you have a son?"

"Because I see him and know him."

"Well, I ain't seen Jesus yet, but I've tested His power. Mr. Bruce, you know what kind of a woman I once was. Did you ever see a meaner or crosser one? Now speak up, don't be afraid."

"I believe you were formerly possessed of rather an invective tongue."

"You're tryin' to smooth it over for me. I don't want you to, and don't know anyhow what that big college word means. I was just too downright cross and ugly to live, and there's no gettin' around it, till I got acquainted with God's blessed Son you're doubtin'."

"You need not be so hard on yourself."

"Hard on myself! Well, I ain't half as hard as I'd ought to be, but now you look here, you be honest. It was learnin' about Jesus that has made this great change in me. If there ain't no Jesus, how do you account for it?"

"I do not know," rising and restlessly pacing the floor, casting now and then furtive glances toward the ceiling.

"I guess not."

"Did Billy tell you about that rich Dr. Dale that has took Rosa Browning?"

"Yes."

"Now it is the love of Jesus that made that there rich man take the child, bless'er, and made him give the money I spent for Billy's clothes and the other things. If there ain't no Jesus, how do you account for that?"

"I do not know. I once in a general way believed in Jesus, but when in college some of the learned professors said that perhaps some portions of the Bible are not authentic. Not knowing myself how to separate

the authentic from the unauthentic, I gave up the whole thing."

"You don't say! Well, I guess them professors must be grandsons of them other smart men that a long time ago tried to find fault in Jesus and delivered Him up to be crucified.

"Would you be glad to know that there really is a Jesus?"

"Well, I don't know, or that is to say—"

"You don't know? Would you like to quit drinkin' and be a man once more and make your wife happy and edicate your boy? Only keep him away from them smart men you just mentioned."

"Indeed I would, but Satan has me, has me fast, I say. It's too late, too late, I'm going over the precipice now!" and the poor wretch shook from head to foot.

"Have you ever honestly tried?"

"Tried, yes, a thousand times with all my might, but with each effort would come the attendant failure and a tightening of the cruel chains which hold me. No one not possessed of the appetite can appreciate even in the slightest degree its awful and irresistible power. Before falling quite to my present position and being deserted by my former friends (all but one), I yearned, oh, how I yearned for a word of help and sympathy! Yes, sympathy was what I wanted, but received curses instead. They had no patience with me. Really, I cannot censure them much, but I did feel that especially those with whom in prosperous times I drank moderately, ought not to be quite so severe. They had the moral strength with which to conquer the appetite when they found it making headway, and I did not; that was the difference."

"Yes, but can't you set down and ca'm yourself, Mr. Bruce? It's just like you all was in boats driftin' down

stream and gettin' caught in the rapids. They had the strength to pull back and you didn't, and then stood and scolded you for bein' so weak, instead of throwin' out the lifeline for you to catch to. That's like the world, but it ain't like Jesus. Have you any reason now to think as you're goin' over the falls that you've got strength to pull clear back to safety?"

"No, oh no, not even a shadow or reason. But if there is a Jesus, why does He not help me? I am slipping, falling, burning up!" he shrieked, throwing himself in a frenzy upon her couch and burying his face in the pillow.

Mrs. Gray hastily administered more coffee, and then for an hour the patient was comparatively quiet. Realizing the uselessness of further talk, she sat by his side awaiting developments.

"What is that?" suddenly he asked, "right up there in the corner?"

"I don't see nothin', Mr. Bruce."

"Why, right up there. Can't you see it? And there's another and another!" jumping frantically to his feet, clutching anything within reach. "Satan has me bound with chains from the infernal region, holding the key himself, and now he is sending his imps to get me! See! Help! Run! Oh, they are coming down through the ceiling! Run, I say, run! Billy, save me, save your father!" and the victim of delirium tremens fell prostrate upon the floor. This was his second attack.



CHAPTER V

Billy's Dream

MARJORIE'S womanhood now asserted itself for the first time in many months, enabling her to face the situation. She sat down by her husband, soothing him with tender assurances of protection.

"Never mind, dear, they cannot hurt you. Marjorie is here, your old-time Marjorie, and has come back to stay, I trust. I'll protect you. Mrs. Gray has gone for a physician, and Billy is right here by your side."

In a short time the doctor arrived, and Mr. Bruce was taken to his own rooms. Presently he was quietly sleeping under the influence of the medicine, and explicit directions were given for his treatment when he should awaken.

"Mis' Bruce," said Mrs. Gray, "now you go to bed, poor thing, and I'll see that your man is all right."

"No, I thank you, but refuse. I cannot remember when I have done one womanly act, so do not deny me the privilege of caring for my husband tonight. Oh, I love him, and I am to blame for all this disgrace. He was once so grand, so true, so noble," and the suffering little woman sobbed for many minutes in the arms of her new friend.

"There, dearie, I wouldn't take on so if I was you.

He'll get over this, for the doctor said he'd seen many worse cases."

"Yes, but my conscience thoroughly awakened for the first time in years is torturing me."

"Well, well, just leave it with the Lord, but don't trust yourself to reform, Mis' Bruce. You can't do it, but He'll help you."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. I didn't drink, but all my life have been a slave to my temper which is as hard to control as the appetite, when once it gets the upperhand. I ain't boastin', for it may come up ag'in, but I know the very minute I really trusted the Lord to help me, life seemed all different, and He come right into my heart, glory!

"Now I see you're right; it is best for you to set up with your man, so I'll leave, but'll be here handy, if anything's wantin'."

The bells on St. John's several blocks away were sweetly and faintly chiming the midnight hour, when Billy slipped from his cot to join his mother in her sad vigil.

"Darling," she said, after a long period of silence, "mamma wants to be a better woman, but cannot without the help of her boy."

"And Jesus too, don't forget Him."

"But I have forgotten Him for a long, long time."

"Did you know about Him then?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes."

"Oh, how could you forget Him? Before I got up I had such a strange dream. I thought I had stole a whole lot of bread, and the cop caught me and put the biggest handcuffs on my hands I ever saw. He was takin' me away, when all at once I saw you and papa before me. You both had on handcuffs too, and chains all about you, only it seemed that the chains was made

of whisky bottles. You was cryin' and papa was scream-in'. He said: 'It's too late, too late! We're goin' over the precipice now!' and I saw right in front of us an awful big black hole that didn't seem to have no bottom to it. Just then Mis' Gray come runnin' as fast as ever she could and called us to follow her, and I thought the cop let us. The chains and handcuffs were so heavy we could hardly do it, but after while we got where there was some men. They was standin' by a cross and nailin' Jesus fast to it. It looked so awful I cried, but He just smiled at us all and said He was takin' our places, and right away the handcuffs and chains dropped off.

"I wish it was true."

The heart-broken mother whispered softly: "The dream is true as to yourself, Billy, and it shall be of me, God being my helper. Right now I feel that no power on earth could tempt me to touch another drop, but I am weak, so weak, I will just trust God."

"Laddie," some time later, "we must not rest now till papa is free from his chains too. But it will be harder for him; I know him well."

"Yes, ma," and his head with drowsiness fell against her shoulder.

His thin, small body was no burden to his mother as she carried him to his cot and laid him gently down.

Till with the breaking of the day her husband grew restless, Marjorie remained upon her knees by her boy in agony of soul far too deep for utterance, reviewing her worse than wasted life, and seeking the help and wisdom of God for the battles she knew must come.



CHAPTER VI

Silent Sufferers

IN a few days Mr. Bruce was at work again and determined that he would never touch another drop of liquor. His wages he gave to Marjorie, who added to their rooms many little homelike touches. Billy was placed in school and was happier then ever before in his short, stormy life.

Mrs. Gray was assiduously avoided by Mr. Bruce, though at every chance meeting he treated her with the utmost respect.

"Never mind, darlin'," she would say to Marjorie, "I'm glad to see him so, for it's a sign he's thinkin' about God. I'd like to talk to him some more mighty well, but guess I've said enough for the present. I'm sure he'll be all right yet, but he'll not hold out the way he's doin'. Don't let it hurt you too much for him to take to drink ag'in, and mebbe harder'n ever."

"I do not talk to him of religious things often myself, Mrs. Gray," Marjorie would confess almost shamefacedly, "for my life will be a more powerful sermon than my words."

"It is low for a man to drink, but how much more low for a woman. I am to blame; I missed my opportunity with Lawrence years ago. I might have led him

to the right, he always loved me so. He did not intend to fall. He was a born social leader and was the central figure wherever he went. The popular demand was for the wine glass, and through it my Lawrence began to slip, and I with him. How little we dreamed of our danger. Oh, why did we not see it then, and why is such alluring temptation allowed to be cast across the pathway of careless, happy, unsuspecting youth!"

Several weeks had passed and spring was approaching. Mr. Bruce had come home drunk on many occasions, and during his sober periods was growing more irritable than Marjorie had ever seen him. How she tried to help by making their rooms attractive, by preparing cooling drinks and dainty ices, by taking long walks with him and by anticipating his every want, Mrs. Gray furnishing the money from her trust fund, when Marjorie's ran low, but all to no avail. Trying days for poor Marjorie these! Surely she would have fallen by the wayside, but for her unbounded delight in her son and his unquestioning confidence in her. Rather than to disappoint him, her prayer was, that before her hand should again raise the cup to her lips, it might fall hopelessly paralyzed to her side.

Her melancholy moods she tried bravely to conceal, but what eye is so keen as the eye of love? Mr. Bruce knew that his wife was in anguish, but, well, he was in hell, and the sooner his family were rid of him the better. He had proven now beyond all doubt, he argued, that he could not break away from his temptation. Had he not suffered for four long weeks without allowing a drop of liquor to pass his thirsty lips? He had not meant to yield then, but he was weak and tired and ill. Perhaps just a little would tide him safely over the crisis, he had thought, so to O'Conner's he went, having studiously avoided that portion of the street since the evening of his memorable experience with Mrs. Gray.

He was not prepared for the taunts and ribaldry of O'Conner and his barroom associates, so after taking the first drink, he took another and yet another, just to prove how false were their assertions of his being tied to the apron strings of a fat old woman mission ranter. Since then such a passion had seized him that drink he must and drink he would till he died. But then poor Marjorie and the laddie! What a bequest for them—a drunkard's name, a drunkard's poverty, a drunkard's disgrace and a drunkard's unmarked grave, which, perhaps, under cover of darkness they would sometimes visit together!

Marjorie was changed, oh, yes, he knew that, but then Marjorie never did mean to do wrong. She was weak, that was all, and loved him so trustingly that she followed in his footsteps wherever he went, even to ruin.

Yes, he had ruined her and compelled their only son to darken and stain his childhood. He was older in the knowledge of crime than any grown man should be, and all because of a drunken father. Oh, if that very minute he might fall to his knees in the prison cell which had given Billy shelter on that pitilessly cold winter night, maybe God would give him strength even yet to overcome. But, no, too late, too late! The sooner he died the better now. When he was gone Marjorie would love him still, for she would never love another. And then she would be free to devote her whole time to the laddie without wasting any more upon an unworthy husband, and in him she would be repaid.

Billy was young yet and the trials of his childhood would soon grow dim. By and by, in his maturer years when he should give his drunken father a thought, he might be charitable and forgiving. And then Marjorie, (God keep her always), to their boy would never speak of his father's failures—only of his virtues, and that would help to mold his opinion.

And so they suffered on, this husband and wife, each shielding the other, till one stifling summer night a crisis came.



CHAPTER VII

The Interrupted Journey

MR. Bruce, recovering from intoxication, had been unable to work that day. He was more than usually sad and quiet, and he refused the delicate food prepared by Marjorie, even though she wept in her entreaties for him at least to taste it.

For some time he had been walking nervously about the room, when suddenly he stopped by her side and kissed her trembling lips.

"Do you love me, darling?" he said.

"Why, yes, Lawrence, more than all the world. You do not doubt it, do you?"

"No, I do not," and a smile lighted up his haggard face.

"And how is it with you, laddie, do you love papa too?"

"You bet I do."

"It is not every man who has so much love bestowed upon him, and now on the strength of your statements, I think I shall go for a walk."

He had taken a few steps down the hallway when he returned, ostensibly for a drink of water, and kissed them each again, this time hastening away.

For some reason Marjorie was sorely depressed.

She wished that she had gone along, but then surely he would return soon. She tried to become interested in a book Mrs. Gray had brought in for her "Billy boy," but on each page all she could see was the smoothly-shaven face of a tall, slender man wanly smiling, a lock of prematurely gray hair carelessly falling over a noble forehead, and dark eyes glittering with an unnatural fire. Why had Lawrence asked so abruptly after his day of unwonted silence if she loved him, and why had he returned after starting? Was it for water, or the kiss which she remembered now to have been if possible more tender than usual? She cast a frightened glance at William, but no, he was only a child and knew nothing of gloomy forebodings.

An hour dragged by. At every noise, real or imaginary, Marjorie jumped almost from her chair. Finally realizing that her nerves were overpowering her, she determined to try to find Lawrence.

"Billy," she tried to speak unconcernedly, "let us take a walk too; it is so very warm in here. We may meet papa."

Entering the hallway, at the top of the stairs a little to one side, Billy picked up something white.

"Ma, here's a letter; the postman must have dropped it."

Snatching it almost frantically from the child's hand, Marjorie rushed to a light, and one look only sufficed to wring from her a low moan of anguish and despair. In a familiar handwriting the one word "Marjorie" was inscribed across the envelope.

For a moment everything was black and reeling, but God heard the unuttered cry of her broken heart and gave her strength to break the seal and read the following:

MY DARLING:—

The battle is lost; I can fight no longer. When you find this note by the morning light, I shall be no more. Do not grieve, for it is better so. An angel from heaven could have done no more than you, my wife, have done, but there is no help for me.

Think of me not as a suicide, but as murdered—murdered by the licensed foe that lurks first in the alluring splendor of the sparkling glass, and then leads his unwilling victim downward step by step through poverty, suffering and disgrace into hell.

Teach our boy to avenge his father's blood by waging fierce battle against this accursed demon.

Now that I, the cause of your downfall, am gone, return with the laddie to your childhood's home, where, I know, you will be welcomed.

And now, my darling, farewell—farewell forever. As I enter the silent land my last thought shall be of you and your devoted love. By and by, when you, and William too, shall have crossed the mystic river, but you to the celestial city of which I have heard you speak, please, amid all the joys and glories there sometimes think with tenderness, pity and love of

YOUR LOST LAWRENCE.

Having read the note as one in a dream, with almost superhuman effort Marjorie gained control of herself, and clutching Billy by the hand sped down the stairway and into the open street.

In the meantime Mr. Bruce had become the center of an excited group in O'Conner's barroom.

"Young man," he was saying, as a youth of perhaps eighteen years was about to take a drink, "touch not the accursed stuff. If you do, it will soon make of you more truly a slave than any wretch who ever bared his back beneath the galling lash of a merciless taskmaster."

"What!" shouted O'Conner, "are you trying to injure my business?"

"Yes," was the cool reply.

"Queer enough, for you are one of my best patrons."

"I know that, and for that very reason I am here tonight to let these men see the end of one who follows you closely for years. You are about to witness a lost

soul plunge into the mysteries of a boundless beyond."

"What do you mean, Bruce?" asked O'Conner quaking from head to foot.

"Only what I say.

"And now," turning to the dozen or more men present, "look at me, a graduate from one of the finest colleges in the land, a man who once belonged in the highest social circles, who held a lucrative position in the largest department store in the city, and the husband of—O God, I cannot mention her name here—and the father of as dear a lad as was ever born. I have lost all, all, and have suffered for years the anguish of a man without hope, if you know what that means, and all because of the business represented by this man O'Conner. I would not be too hard on him, oh, no, for he is properly and legally licensed to work this ruin. But, men, in God's name, right about face before your last atom of strength and will power leaves you, and," drawing from his pocket a glittering razor, "upon the wreck of my ruined life build well."

During the tragic scene O'Conner had been growing white with rage, for well he knew the effect upon that night's sales. With curses and oaths filling the air, he grasped a heavy bottle hurling it with all his might toward Mr. Bruce's head and saying: "Drop the razor, I'll save you the trouble of using it!"

The bottle missed its mark, but on it crashed. A faint scream, and upon the filthy floor lay the limp body of a delicate little woman, a stream of blood covering her white forehead.

Amazement and horror held all spell-bound, till a boy dashed forward uttering a horrified cry.

The now thoroughly frightened O'Conner, grasping the import of the situation, sped from the rear of the room with the utmost haste, and it was well that he did. The excited and half-drunken men in their intense anger

and indignation were ready to wreak upon him their vengeance for his cruel and dastardly deed.

A policeman entered to ascertain the trouble, but no arrests were made.

The next morning's paper stated merely that there had been another drunken brawl in O'Conner's Burton street saloon, an ordinary occurrence indeed, in which a number of men and one woman of low class had had a hand.

When Mr. Bruce saw lying upon the floor his Marjorie, he stood transfixed with terror, nor could he move till Billy's piercing shriek rent the air. A moan, but the epitome of all his heart's anguish, was the only sound to escape him. Then tenderly lifting in his arms the apparently lifeless form, he rushed to a nearby drug store, followed by Billy and several others.

A physician was summoned.

"No," he said in answer to the question he read in the agonized expression on Mr. Bruce's face, "she is not dead, neither is she fatally injured, providing no complications arise.

"Thank God," was all the husband could say.

The bells of St. John's once more were chiming the midnight hour, when, everything being done that could be done, Mr. Bruce, alone at last, knelt by the bedside of his sleeping and all but martyred wife. Long had he been there, too dazed for consecutive thought, to say nothing of cogent reasoning, when in the adjoining room Billy slipped from his bed, silently joining his father, and tucking a soft, warm hand within the cold, thin one outstretched in welcome.

Poor, troubled, sympathetic child! His heart seemed heavier than a load of stone. He wanted to help, but then how could he, for he was only a boy?

Presently a sob escaping him, his father was aroused.

"What is it, my boy?" he whispered. "Do not worry

about mamma, for you and I together, and Mrs. Gray will soon make her well."

"No, daddy, not that, but I was thinkin'—"

"Speak on, son, and tell me."

"That I wished—wished you'd let Jesus do it."

"Do what, Billy?"

"Oh, break those awful chains, 'cause He wants to, and He said He took your place."

Fearing that they might disturb the patient, the distracted father with his weeping son entered the next room, and for many minutes he paced rapidly backward and forward in such an agony of mind that few ever experience. He tried to think.

Was Billy right? He might be. It could not be simply accident for Marjorie to have found the note he had not intended for her till morning, then with no clue whatever for tracing his footsteps, save that of his own slavish habit, to reach the saloon at just the proper moment for saving his life, and at such fearful cost! Only one moment more and he would have been beyond all help. That looked, the more he thought of it, as though God really did care for him after all, and if so, logically, there must be *hope*. Oh, how he trembled and how his very being thrilled! *Hope*—hope for *him*? Could it be possible? He feared to think so.

"You are sure Billy, God will help?"

"Of course. He helped mamma."

"Yes, yes, so He did. I certainly have seen in the last few months what His power can do, and *I will put it to the test myself*."

Mr. Bruce, not the one who had entered the room a while before, but the transformed Mr. Bruce, with peace filling his soul, again sought the bedside of his wife, and whispered in her unhearing ear that God had given her a new husband who, by His help, henceforth would be more worthy of her great love and devotion.



CHAPTER VIII

Mrs. Gray, Strategist

MRS. Gray, after the evening of her first brief encounter with O'Conner, could not rest till an effort was made toward renting a room for the prospective mission. Burton street needed a mission, she reasoned, a wealthy man of consecration would pay all necessary expenses, so she was quite willing indeed to match wits with O'Conner in the securing of a location.

A week had elapsed since the evening of her experience with the Bruces, before she found time and opportunity to begin her work in earnest. She knew of three vacant rooms in the immediate neighborhood, any one of which might suit her purpose, one of them being in the building adjoining O'Conner's, and the other two directly across the street.

One dreary afternoon, with the rain falling and the wind blowing, she started forth, first going to the agent in charge of the room nearest the saloon.

"Is there something I may do for you, madam?" he courteously inquired, placing for her a chair.

"Well, yes, I guess so, thank you, sir. I come to ask about that there room right down below here with the 'For rent' card in the window. Is it rented yet?"

"It is not."

"Then I'll take it."

"Ordinarily, madam, a prospective renter inquires into prices, et cetera, before making a definite decision. You seem a little hasty."

"I be, but I'm on the King's business, and that always requires haste. I know what the average room around here rents for, and I want it, and for five years too. I'm ready to have the papers drawn up right away."

"Ah, pardon me, are you,—well, may I ask to what purpose you expect to devote the room in question?"

"Oh, I'm just goin' to open up a little business that'll be for the general good of all who give me a call."

"Do you mean a mission?"

"Yes, that is exactly what I mean."

"Then I am very sorry indeed to inform you that the room is not available for that purpose."

"For the land's sake, why?"

"I am not here to discuss the situation, madam; I am only an agent for those in authority. If there is nothing else I may do for you, we shall consider our interview closed."

There being no alternative, Mrs. Gray slowly walked through the door he held open for her. Disappointed, though not discouraged, she made her way to the agent in charge of the other rooms, but with him met with no better success.

Not knowing what else to do, she then turned homeward, where she might quietly think the matter over without interruption. While passing O'Conner's saloon, he stepped out, greeting her with mock civility.

"My mission friend, I believe, whose name I have been happy to learn is Mrs. Gray. May I ask you, without wishing to be inquisitive of course, what success you have had in securing a desirable location for your most worthy enterprise?"

"If you mean by all that gush, O'Conner, whether I'm goin' to get a room or not, I'll say yes."

He looked surprised and laid aside his mask of dignity.

"I believe you lie, you old—"

"No, I don't either. I didn't say I already have a room, but that I'm goin' to get one, and I am too, if I have to hunt every day for a year."

"Oh, that's different. 'A bird in the hand,' you know, 'is worth two in the bush' any time. There's nothing, I assure you," with an air of superiority, "like standing in well with rich up-town brewers who now and then happen to own a building or two."

"So that's it, is it O'Conner? You asked them brewers to notify their agents not to rent to me. You're afraid to have the Lord's work begun here, and well you may be, for just as fast as His work gets a foothold, the devil has to step down and out, though nothin' personal meant by that of course. I'll let you know just as soon as I get a room.

"I must be movin' on now really though, for climbin' up and down so many steps and bein' out in this here rain is givin' me the rheumatiz all over. Good day."

"Not quite all over, I guess, the more's the pity for it ain't struck your tongue yet, ha, ha, ha!

"My tenderest sympathy goes with you, by dear Mrs. Gray. Good day."

Mrs. Gray sat long over her toast and tea that evening, thinking of her afternoon's experience.

Had an observer been present when at last she laid her weary body down to rest, it would have been evident from the expression of determination on her face, that some plan of aggression had taken tangible form within her mind.

On the next morning at about eleven o'clock she found herself in the handsome reception room of Dr.

Dale's office, patiently waiting for her turn to come when she might be ushered into the presence of this very prominent physician. At last the welcome summons came. Fifteen minutes thereafter the doctor himself had seen her to the elevator, and then had re-entered his private office and was laughing till the tears were chasing each other down his cheeks.

"If she can do it," was his thought, "I'll see her through, if my check has to be doubled and then doubled again. And my letter of recommendation will show her to be a person of reliability when she has legal business to transact."

That afternoon, cautiously to be sure, for she had no desire to see O'Conner, she walked into the pawn shop next door to the saloon.

"Has the lady something to leave, or has she come to redeem some articles of value?" asked the black-eyed Jew, rubbing his hands together and smiling blandly at the prospect of, perhaps, getting the better end of some new deal.

"No, neither, thank you sir."

"Then let me sell you something cheap, very cheap. I have some bargains the like of which you have never seen—in fact, the best ever offered. And if I can trust you, as I am sure I can, I'll do even better, making you some confidential prices, strictly confidential, you understand. I could do it with no one else."

"Just wait a minute, Mr. Levi, will you and give me a chance to tell what I want?"

"To be sure, to be sure, but I am positive I can please you and at bottom prices. No one ever undersells me—"

"Hold on, Mr. Levi; I don't want nothin' you've got in the room, but want the room itself—who owns this here buildin'?"

"A stock company, but the lady must be out of her head."

"No, I ain't either. Who's their agent?"

"Mr. Emerson."

"Glory! then he ain't one of them pesky fellows I seen yesterday."

"If you'll just rent one of them rooms across the street for yourself, Mr. Levi, and transfer your lease on this one to me, and do it this afternoon, I'll give you fifty dollars, and have it right here in my pocket now."

"The lady is asking a great deal for a little," nevertheless Mrs. Gray did not fail to note the avaricious gleam of the snapping black eyes. "Fifty dollars would be a very small consideration. Can't you do better?"

Mrs. Gray did not intend telling him till she had to that she could make it seventy-five dollars and as much more as necessary.

"How would sixty do then, Mr. Levi?"

"Couldn't think of it for so little, couldn't think of it at all."

"Very well, then, good day. I'm awful sorry we can't come to no agreement."

"Wait a minute, will the lady wait?" as she started for the door.

"Mr. Levi, I'm in a hurry. Say what you'll do, or I'll leave."

"If the lady will make it sixty, and pay all legal and moving expenses, I'll have the transfer made this very afternoon."

"Thank you, I'll do it; come on."

Some time later Mrs. Gray triumphantly and boldly walked up to O'Conner's saloon and entered.

"How'd do, Mr. O'Conner," she said brightly. "Bein' a woman of my word, I just thought I'd drop in a spell on my way home and tell you about my room."

"Yes," he answered decidedly surprised, "you've got one, have you, in a different location?"

"Yes, a different location from what I was lookin' at yesterday, and much better."

"Several blocks away then, for the three rooms you looked after yesterday are the only nearby vacancies. In what block are you?"

"In the one generally known around these parts as O'Conner's."

"What," he thundered, growing purple with rage, "you are an old black-tongued liar!"

Mrs. Gray's placidity was not in the least disturbed.

"I told you," she answered with exasperating calmness, "that I was goin' to get a foothold here, and I have. I'm goin' to be your next door neighbor to the right, O'Conner, and just to save expenses, wouldn't it be a good thing for us to go into partnership buyin' a sign board? The end of it over your door could say, 'This way to hell,' and over mine, 'This way to heaven.'"

"Ha, ha, O'Conner!" chimed in an interested loafer, "more truth'n poetry in that remark, but, say, I bet if your thoughts right now was put into print, they wouldn't look well as a motto for the other end of the sign."

When the boisterous laughter occasioned by these remarks had subsided sufficiently, Mrs. Gray in reply to O'Conner's sullen question continued:

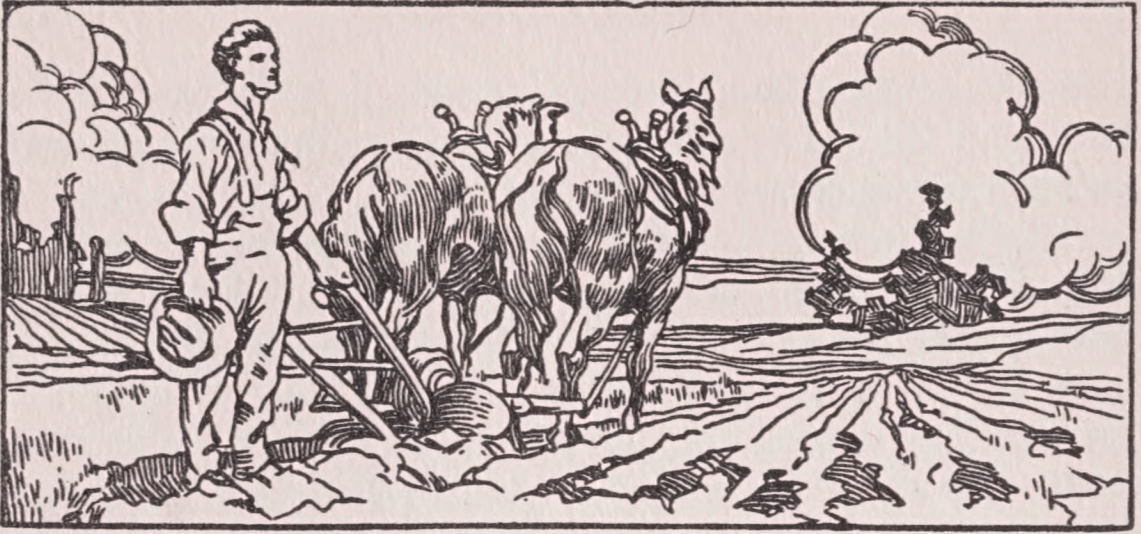
"How did I get hold of the room? Oh, that's easy. It may be a good thing to stand in well with rich up-town brewers, but it's a heap sight better to stand in well with rich up-town doctors that love the Lord and ain't afraid to spend their money for Him. It ain't much trouble to transfer leases, you know, and I take possession in three days. You understand I ain't goin' to do the preachin.' These up-town folks is goin' to see that that's looked after."

O'Conner's rage was growing uncontrollable. He cursed till even the loafers on the empty whiskey bar-

rels were disgusted, and called down imprecations on her head till his vocabulary, extensive though as it was in such terms, was exhausted.

"Well, I'm awful sorry," she said, preparatory to leaving, "to hear you talk so about the blessed Jesus that took your place once, for He loves you yet, O'Conner. But, poor man, I expect nobody has ever gone to the trouble to tell you much about Him. You ain't never seen only the dark and evil side of life, but how glad the Master'd be to take you by the hand and lead you out into the sunlight of His love. You know, O'Conner, better'n I do that saloon-keepers don't get much but kicks and abuses from 'most of folks. The Lord's about all that loves 'em, I guess, so if I was you, I'd quit cursin' Him."

The bartender was unprepared for this sudden turn, so stood speechless, if not altogether ashamed, while Mrs. Gray shook hands with all present, himself included, cordially inviting them to call at the other end of the sign as soon as the room should be opened.



CHAPTER IX

The Mission Launched

MRS. GRAY'S conversion was not simply in theory, but was a fact potent and vitalizing, altering entirely her *modus operandi*. Always independent, original, energetic, now with the love of God and fellowmen permeating her very being, she threw herself into the work of the mission with a zeal both commendable and unique. Knowing from experience the trials of abject poverty, this almoner of Dr. Dale's was pre-eminently fitted for her position. Of social settlement work she had never heard, but being thoroughly practical, she realized that "preachin'" only could not meet the requirements of a starving man. She hoped to spend much of her time in going from house to house to look up the neglected, in relieving necessity where the doing of it would not tend to pauperize the recipient of her gifts, and above all to solicit recruits for the mission.

When at last she came into possession of the vacated pawn shop, the joy known only to those who have given themselves in service for others filled her already happy heart to overflowing. The room was not large, neither well lighted nor ventilated, but the thorough cleaning under her supervision and the fresh calcimining of the

walls worked wonders. Scripture texts were everywhere in evidence, substantial chairs stood in precise straight rows, but the crown of all was a fine new organ close by the stand which held the Bible. The organ was a surprise from Dr. Dale, who himself was a musician.

While all these details of arrangement were being completed, Mrs. Gray's active brain was trying to devise a suitable inscription for the "sign board," subject, of course, to the approval of Dr. Dale. Scripture texts, "The Lighthouse," "The Life-Line," "The Rescue Mission," were all becoming in her mind a kind of indefinable mass, when suddenly she decided on "Hope for the Hopeless Through This Door," thinking that the reader would instantly contrast in his mind the difference between the two doors, or the two ends of the sign.

It was late in the afternoon before the mission was to be opened in the evening. Mrs. Gray alone, tired, happy, was sitting where she could note the general effect of the room, when—crash! She rushed to the front, and there on the walk lay her beloved sign board in splinters. Tears for a moment filled her eyes, then she slowly went back and locked the door, drew the blinds at the windows and dropped upon her knees.

"O Lord," she prayed, "I know O'Conner done that, but I didn't see him. He's sendin' so many poor fellows in the wrong direction, that I want to help start 'em in the right. Give me courage, and I'll never give up. Amen."

Promptly at seven o'clock that evening the door of the signless Hope Mission was thrown open. Dr. Dale, a small, alert man in the habit of commanding and being obeyed, presided, and only a little less enthusiastic than was Mrs. Gray. The room was full of men and boys, with here and there a woman. As Mrs. Gray surveyed the audience her heart throbbed, and tears

again filled her eyes. The mission was needed, that was evident, and a mission Burton street should have, if O'Conner should tear down the whole building. Bleared eyes and purple faces, glittering eyes and haggard faces were everywhere to be seen, despair stamped on nearly all. Oh, yes, the mission was needed!

After the songs, Dr. Dale stated in a few simple words that Hope Mission was opened for the benefit of any who might need help in temporal or spiritual things, and that every evening there would be a service conducted by himself or some one else from his church, their object being to lead the lost to Christ and to help the unfortunate to help themselves.

Cordially inviting all present to return and bring their acquaintances, he then picked up his Bible and turned to the story of the Prodigal Son.

“‘A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off,

his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.'

"We have here briefly a picture of the sinner away from God, his awakening, his return and the Father's love.

"The earlier part of this young man's sojourn was spent in riotous living, or what the world terms 'having a good time.' By and by, his money gone, a famine swept over the land, obliging him to join himself to a citizen of this foreign country. This citizen put him to the most disreputable task in his power, that of feeding the swine. The young man in his hunger fain would have eaten the husks the swine ate, but note especially, 'no man gave unto him.' Many of you, men, see in this your own portrait. In those earlier years when you were sowing your wild oats, you were popular with your companions. As long as you were able to put up the treat they flocked around you, but presently the famine came, or in other words, through your riotous living your money was gone and you were deserted by your so-called friends. Then you found yourself hopelessly bound to Satan, doing at his bidding what you would not.

"The young man in his misery began thinking of his father's house, knowing that the most menial servant there was living a princely life compared to his own groveling condition. Why should he perish when at home there was enough and to spare? Pause for a

moment, men, and consider why *you* should perish, when you have the privilege of being sons of the Heavenly Father.

My Father is rich in houses and lands,
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands!
Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold
His coffers are full—He has riches untold.

“‘*I will arise.*’ That was the pivot on which his whole life turned. ‘I will tell my father,’ he said, ‘how wicked I have been, and that I am no more worthy to be called his son.’ He did not stop to argue the matter with himself—that he must first cleanse his life from this sin and from that sin, and that after all it was presumptuous for him to start, the probabilities being he could not hold out. What did he do? The only sane thing possible. *He arose, and went.* The first thing you must do, men, if you are ever saved, is *to will to arise.* Then, like the young man, do not for a moment stop to argue the case. If you do, looking at yourself and all the obstacles about you, you are no better off than you were before your awakening. Oh, that I could make you see the boundless depths of the Father’s yearning love! If I could, every one of you poor prodigals would come home to Him tonight.

“‘And when he,’ the young man, ‘was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.’ Is not that *love*? This boy by his willfulness and prodigality had well-nigh broken his father’s heart. Oh, the long midnight hours when he wondered where his boy could be, the restless days divided between hope and fear! But all the anguish is forgotten now: the boy is coming home. That is all the father wants to know. How did he answer his son’s confession? By saying, ‘Yes, you have made me much trouble?’ No, but by commanding the

servants to bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and to put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and to prepare a great feast in his honor.

"When my little Margaret, now in the Father's house above, was a small child, one day through her disobedience she wandered away. I was terror-stricken, for a baby alone in a large city is exposed to countless dangers. As I gave the alarm and started myself on the frantic search, to my mind's eye I could see my darling ground to pieces beneath the many vehicles on the street, or worse still, stolen by some wretch. On, on I went, till at last coming around a corner I saw the little familiar form. Did I punish her? No, her fright was sufficient punishment, and I never loved her more than when I lifted her up, soiled garments and all, into my arms. And so, men, our heavenly Father is watching for you. He knows the numberless dangers to which you are exposed, and is longing unutterably for you to come home. All He asks is willingness on your part. He will meet you on the way, clothing you with Jesus' righteousness. Moreover, 'there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.' He will forget your sins. He wants to save you. 'Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.' 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.'"

The strange assemblage listened attentively. There was no evidence that many were much impressed.

But a few stayed for an informal after-meeting, among them being an overgrown country boy with a troubled, perplexed countenance.

"Say, Doc," suddenly he asked, "who told you about me?"

"No one. Why do you think so?"

"Oh, 'cause," growing red in the face, shuffling his feet over the floor and trying to find a place some-

where for his big, brawny hands. "I thought you meant me, and reckoned as how somebody'd told you."

"No, I never heard of you before, my boy, but tell me yourself," sitting down by his side and smiling encouragingly.

"There ain't much to tell, only me and dad and my sister lived on a farm a long ways from here down the country, and I got uneasy. I had been told that folks in a city can git rich without workin' at all, if they wuz only smart enough, and I wanted to try. An agent down our way for a while said so, and he seemed to take to me right smart. I concluded to come to the city with him. I had a hundred and fifty dollars saved up, and he said I could make it a thousand or more in just a few days. Dad wouldn't consent, so I run off, and I know it 'most broke his heart. When we got here the agent said I must learn a simple game with cards, but to do it I had to put up a little money. That sounded easy, so I bit, but got bit lots worse, Doc. He soon had the pile and skipped out. I ain't seen him since, and have had an awful time, pickin' up a job now and then when I could git it. I'm dead broke. I wish I wuz back with dad, but ain't got no money fer a ticket. It's so dirty here in the city, and I ain't seen a sunset, or heard a bird sing since I come, and the river's awful, it's that nasty. It ain't fit to drown in, or I expect I wouldn't be here now. I don't know how dad'll git his work done this spring," meditatively, "and it won't be long till corn plowin' time either."

"My boy," asked the doctor gently, "do you really want to go home?"

"Yes," and he tried to conceal his tears.

"Do you know anything about horses?"

"Oh, gee, yes, you bet I do," brightening up instantly, "Dick and Belle is the work team, and dad give me Dan when he wuz just a little colt, and Dan would follow

me when I went to the lower pasture for the cows just like good old Shep. Then when he got old enough to break, I rode him fur and near, and the fellow's all said Dan's like wuz not to be found, he wuz that swift and handsome. Dan's a chestnut brown. I expect he misses me, and more'n likely he ain't had exercise enough this winter."

"My boy, I can trust you, I think. I can give you work in my stables, and soon you will have enough money to take you back home. I'll advance right now three dollars on your wages. Get yourself all the supper you can eat and a good night's lodging, then in the morning come to this address," handing him his card with the money. "Will you do it?"

"Yes, thank ye, sir," he answered as well as his swelling throat would permit, and drawing a ragged coat sleeve across his eyes.

And he did. A few weeks thereafter an old white haired man "down the country" was made glad, and the boy, whistling as merrily as the redbirds, plowed the corn with Dick and Belle, while at the close of the busy days he would mount Dan's back for a spin along the river side toward the gorgeously painted sunsets.

That wonderful first night after the mission Mrs. Gray was too happy to sleep, so spent many hours over her Bible, and laying out plans for the future.

The doctor, as he was entering his stone mansion, was sure he had never seen the stars shining so brightly before, and he thought, of course it was imagination, that he saw up there among them the face of his little lost Margaret smiling down upon him. After looking for a moment at his sleeping foster child, he retired to his room, pitying his friends in his exclusive social circle, for he knew that to them had never come the joy he experienced when extending a helping hand to the simple-minded, homesick country boy.

tending his hand, "I cannot attend the mission tonight, so thought I'd drop in for a chat."

"Very well, Mr. O'Conner, set down. Am sorry you can't stay, for Dr. Dale's goin' to talk on the good Samaritan, helpin' your neighbors, you know."

"I should be pleased to stay, thank you, if possible, but haven't time even to sit down. To tell the truth, I am becoming quite interested in this enterprise of yours. I misunderstood you at first, and I hope you have it in your heart to let bygones be bygones."

"Certainly, but I must say I don't like your business any better'n I did before."

"To be sure, but that's a little point on which we don't agree, Mrs. Gray. To speak plainly, I'll say that I think I have more of the Samaritan spirit than you have. You are trying to injure your neighbor's business, while I to the contrary am trying to help and encourage mine."

"I appreciate your interest, Mr. O'Conner, but it's more'n I can understand how you can be workin' both ends of the sign at once."

"Ha, ha, you amuse me, but I must go right away. Regardless of our small difference of opinion and your opposition to me, I have decided to make a cash offering to this work. Here is a box," at the same time picking up his hat preparatory to leaving, "which contains one hundred dollars. Please hand it to Dr. Dale with my best wishes."

Dr. Dale at this moment unexpectedly entered, noticeably to the discomfiture of O'Conner, who started hastily for the door.

Mrs. Gray suspecting that something was wrong, stepped in front of him, effectually blocking the narrow aisle.

"Here, Doctor," she said, "open this box so as you can thank Mr. O'Conner before he leaves."

Upon complying with her request, the box was found to be empty.

O'Conner's face grew white and then black with rage.

"You sly old hag!" he shouted, shaking beneath her nose his fist, "the evil spirits protect you, I know, or I could corner you some way."

"O'Conner," she replied without a tremor, "not the evil spirits protect me, but the heavenly Father. You did not intend to have that box opened in your presence, then later on you would have come back and had me arrested for stealing the money you would have sworn the box to have contained. And now," stepping aside, "go on out, and the next time you come back may it be to seek the forgiveness of your sins."

This proved to be O'Conner's last direct attack upon the mission or Mrs. Gray. Thereafter he turned siege upon the poor fellows seeking the right, doing all in his power to get them to visit his end of the sign instead of hers, and had placed in his saloon an orchestra and other counter attractions, which for the time being perceptibly lessened the mission attendance.

The days swiftly came and went, the importance of the work constantly growing. The need of a regular superintendent was becoming apparent, but as yet the man for the place could not be found. Dr. Dale was especially desirous that no mistake should be made, preferring to carry indefinitely the responsibility himself, to hastening the matter unduly. It was not his intention in any respect to supplant Mrs. Gray, who filled her own sphere with a faithfulness that would put to shame many a more richly endowed Christian.

The doctor more than once admitted to himself that, when fatigue and the pressure of his busy life tempted him to be somewhat negligent, a thought of Mrs. Gray kept him true to his own ideals.

Mrs. Gray was unfeignedly happy, but the one long-

ing of her soul was to be able to "talk," so that she too might be the direct means of rescuing a few of the lost. One evening she felt a strong desire to speak to a man who was young, yet only a wreck. He was tall and heavy, his black hair falling about his face in a tangled mass; his features were unusually handsome, except for the unmistakable signs of a dissipated life, and his clothes were disreputable.

As Mrs. Gray sat down by his side, he drew away, saying that he was unfit for a self-respecting woman to speak to. He did not know why he was there, unless it was the music that attracted him. He had had no thought of entering, but was on his way to the drug store to procure carbolic acid with which to put an end to his miserable existence. Had he a wife? Oh, yes, and two little girls, and how he longed to see them! At one time he received a large salary and supported his family in luxury in one of the largest hotels of the city. He began drinking wine socially, and then went down, *down*, DOWN! His wife did all she could to save him, but he left her, knowing himself unfit to be in her pure and noble presence.

These facts were given disjointedly, his massive frame shaking with convulsive sobs. Mrs. Gray pointed him to the Saviour as well as she knew how, for "Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*." He seemed unable to grasp it, his agony only increasing. All he did was to promise to return the next evening, which promise he kept. Illness keeping Mrs. Gray at home, she received from Dr. Dale the message that the man had been gloriously saved.

In a few days the following letter* came, the memory of which ever afterward gave her courage to extend the

*A copy of a letter in the hands of the author, written by a convert of the Pacific Garden Mission, Chicago. The foregoing account of the man is correct.

helping hand even to the apparently most hopeless cases:

DEAR MADAM:—

I hope you will forgive my abrupt and plainly-spoken words, having met you but once. That was under strange circumstances, but I shall always remember the way it made my introduction to a new and better world. You will forgive my way of writing. Writing letters on a religious matter has been entirely foreign to me, and this will make my first attempt. Were it a letter on political economy, I could start and finish very well.

I cannot describe my feelings after I left you that night. I lived my whole life over again in a few short hours. It was a night of horror, no sleep for me. I got out of bed and dressed at midnight, and walked the streets till morning like a mad man, all the passion in me being roused to its highest pitch. The fight was on between right and wrong. I thought I was going mad. I tried to reason with myself, but could not; tried to see if there were any love in me. There was not, only the love of a hyena as it destroys its helpless prey. Then I remembered the verse you repeated to me: "Come, let us reason together," and I tried to reason with my Creator. I looked in a glass at myself. There I saw a shrinking, shriveling coward, afraid to acknowledge his Creator, God, and to love his Saviour Jesus Christ. I saw this frail craft of humanity, tempest-tossed on dark waters, soon to be dashed against barren rocks and every hope to be shattered forever, and worst of all, I stood on the very brink of hell, soon to be plunged to its depths below. I awoke, found that life was not a dream, but tragedy in reality. What had been my idol sin lay shattered before my eyes in ten thousand pieces. I was and am saved. I saw the lighthouse by those bright shores. By the power of God you threw the lifeline, I grasped it, and am now landed at the feet of the lowly Nazarene. I will follow Him all the way from Galilee to Calvary.

I cannot find words to thank you for the few short moments you spent with me. You cannot realize what you have done. Your prayers have bridged a great gulf that has separated man and wife. It will make in the future a happy home; it will make a wife that is prematurely old young. It is the regeneration of me and my whole house.

I am happy, and may God bless you, will always be my prayer.

I am sincerely yours,



CHAPTER XI

The Upward Climb

AFTER the night of the barroom tragedy, Mrs. Bruce lay ill for several days.

For a week Mr. Bruce scarcely left her side only for short intervals of rest when Mrs. Gray took up the vigil. A sad and profitable time it proved to be. When her strength returned sufficiently, they talked calmly of their early years and their many mistakes, only that henceforth they might avoid the pitfalls set for the unwary, and a deep peace filled their souls. They had fallen together, they had suffered together, and now, by the grace of God, they would rise together. Surely the Father was tenderly watching over them to have preserved them during those awful years, and to have rescued them both from the very jaws of horrible deaths, so henceforth to Him their lives belonged. They would help in the mission and perhaps save a few from the agony and despair so well known to them.

Mr. Bruce would depend on odd jobs of work no longer for their livelihood, but with all his might would seek permanent employment. If he succeeded, he would return to Mrs. Gray the money of Dr. Dale's that she had expended for them.

On the very first morning that Marjorie felt strong

enough to be gotten up for the day, Mr. Bruce determined to face the world once more in earnest.

Billy, whistling, with his hands in his pockets and his cap on the back of his head, accompanied his father to the car line.

"Here, laddie," he said, tossing him a coin just as his car came swinging around the corner, "spend this today exactly as you like."

"Gee! Dad's a trump!" he exclaimed and away he ran.

The father a few moments later was thinking that the boy's pleasure would far more than compensate for the giving up of his own luncheon, which he would now have to do, and was wondering if for their sakes he could possibly carry out his two well-defined plans for the day. He wished he were not so foolishly proud. But rise he must, and rise he would regardless of cost to himself. He would begin where he made that cruel mistake in his early young manhood. On he rode for some distance, till he reached the oldest residence section of the city. Alighting and walking down an avenue, he came to an aristocratic old stone house which had stood for years. The extensive grounds surrounding it were well kept. The overhanging boughs of the towering trees met in cool, green, inviting archways over the winding walks and drives, while flowers made the air heavy with their fragrance, and vines were running in the greatest of profusion over the porches. A fountain near the entrance of the mansion was sending its sparkling spray aloft from the hand of the sculptured maid, and then falling in gentle showers over a mass of water lilies and ferns. The whole unmodernized scene was beautiful, involuntarily carrying the spectator back a generation.

Mr. Bruce lingered for several minutes along the

walk, being too weak from nervousness and dread to do otherwise. Presently he wandered over a slope to a secluded spot shaded by a gnarled old oak, the monarch of the estate.

"This," he mused, sitting down on the grass, "is where we stood when Marjorie, a frightened, tearful child of eighteen, told me that she would be my wife, even to the giving up of father, mother and home. I ought not to have allowed such a sacrifice, but then I had so much confidence in myself, feeling sure that I could bring about a reconciliation, and that all would be well."

His melancholy retrospection ran on till he almost forgot the present, or why he was there at all. Finally, with a start he jumped to his feet, clasping with his hands his aching head, fearing that already he had lingered too long. Resolutely now he ascended the broad steps and rang the bell.

Old Ben, who had been born a slave in the judge's southern boyhood home and who had come north with "de young mas'r," serving the Sommerville family most faithfully all his life, met Mr. Bruce at the door, and instantly recognized him.

"Mas'r Lawrence, Mas'r Lawrence!" he exclaimed in his delight, for Uncle Ben had never ceased mourning "fo' de young folks."

At a silencing gesture from Mr. Bruce, he did not speak again aloud, but his emotion was almost uncontrollable.

"Uncle Ben, is Judge Sommerville in?"

An affirming nod of the woolly head was given in answer, "and so's de missis," he added significantly.

"No," almost sternly in his earnestness, "she must not know I am here. My effort may fail, and she need not be unnecessarily agitated."

"As de mas'r says, but she's sure mournin' her life away. How is de young missis, Mas'r Lawrence, fo' Uncle Ben's ol' heart am hungry too?"

"She is happy, but I must see her father without delay. Remember you are not to tell."

"Yes, sah," knocking on the library door.

"What is wanted?" rather crustily called the judge, being annoyed at the interruption.

"A gemmin wishes to see you, sah, Mas'r Sommer-ville."

"Very well, bring him in."

Lawrence Bruce was calm now that the crucial moment had come, and he faced the judge without a tremor.

Judge Sommerville was a superior man, which fact he well knew. Wealthy, dignified, scholarly, polished, he was the embodiment of that style of haughty gentlemen that involuntarily calls forth from the average person a feeling both of respect and fear.

At a glance Lawrence saw that he had greatly aged, his hair being white, though he was not much over sixty. He was slightly stooped, and his hand, on which sparkled a splendid diamond, trembled as he laid down his book and adjusted his eyeglasses preparatory to meeting his guest.

Lawrence did not speak, but only bowed as the judge looked up. For a moment the latter failed to recognize the tall, haggard, neatly though plainly dressed man at his side, then an expression of unutterable surprise crossed his face.

"Lawrence Bruce," in the tone he had used one other time, "you are unwelcome. From your appearance, I presume you are after money. I have none for you, for your wife, nor for your son, who is a thief. Be gone, and as I bade you once before, never have the

audacity again to darken my door with your insolent presence."

"Judge Sommerville," and for the first time in his life the judge actually cowered before Lawrence Bruce whose indignation was roused to the highest pitch, "I obey, but first let me say that I never have asked you for money and I never will. I can support my own family. If you were not an old gentleman, the father of my wife, and if my son did not bear your name, William Sommerville, I would knock you down for calling him a thief."

The judge was surprised and knew that he was treading dangerous ground.

"Very well, then, not a thief, but because of a drunken father only *took* the bread to prevent starvation."

"That is true," answered Lawrence simply. "The worst that you can say about me is too good, but insinuations against my family I cannot and will not stand. May I ask how you have any definite knowledge of my son?"

"I presided at his trial last winter and freed him. I discovered his identity through an uncouth, half-crazy old creature, who volunteered more information than I wanted."

Lawrence's eyes flashed rather ominously, but he only said, "I thank you for freeing the child."

The judge tried to look indifferent, while Lawrence continued:

"I did wrong, and it was through me alone that your daughter fell. I came here to tell you so, hoping to find you at heart the gentleman you are on the exterior, but I am disappointed. Your daughter is a reclaimed and Christian woman to whom through God I owe my life, and I too am a Christian man beginning all over again.

"I could not be satisfied till I came here to acknowledge my wrong, and if possible to find a welcome for my wife, and for no other reason. I now withdraw, and the next time I come, it will be on your invitation."

"To preclude disappointment, do not expect it this week."

Lawrence hastily made his way to the hall, fearing that he could suppress his anger no longer, and the judge too was losing all control of himself. As he passed through the door, Mrs. Sommerville, a small, dainty woman, prematurely old, with restless dark eyes and sunken cheeks, clad in a pretty morning gown of lavender scented with violets, was about to ascend the stairs.

Lawrence hastily retreated, but not before he was seen and recognized.

"Oh, Lawrence," she screamed, "I have been looking for you for so many long years! Why, oh why, have you not come before? Where in this great city have you and my darling been burying yourselves? I want you and my Marjorie back, no difference what you have done.

"There, there, little mother," Lawrence said soothingly, taking her hand in his, "you have lifted from my heart an awful burden. You at least have forgiven us—"

"I never blamed you, and I tried to keep father from being so severe."

"Is she well—my baby?"

"Yes, or rather is recovering from an illness."

"Will you go and get her and bring her back to stay?"

"Impossible, dearest mother, under present circumstances. This welcome from you is an unspeakable benediction, but," gently pushing her from him, "I must go."

"And remember," called the judge, in his iciest tones, "you are not to return; my will is unalterable."

"Lawrence," pleaded Mrs. Sommerville, heedless of her husband, "didn't Marjorie send some word to mother—just some little word?"

"She does not know that I am here. I cannot break her heart afresh by telling her of this venture."

"You won't tell her that mother loves her still?"

"How can I without adding that her father hates her still?"

Mrs. Sommerville looked at him intently for a moment, staggered, and then fell fainting into her husband's arms.

"Lawrence Bruce, be gone!" shouted the judge, now utterly unmindful of his usually studied dignity. "You have stolen from me my daughter, and aught I know have now killed my wife."

Until the afternoon Lawrence sat in seclusion under the oak, too dazed to have any particular feeling, and scarcely knowing whether he was awake or dreaming. He was not surprised—nothing could surprise him—when Uncle Ben appeared, setting down by his side a tray of luncheon.

"Mas'r Lawrence, fo'give me, but I watched and knew whar you was. You must eat, you sure must, or you'll be sick."

Mechanically, to please the good old darkey, he obeyed, and felt much the stronger for it.

"How is your mistress, Uncle Ben?" presently he asked, handing him the tray and rising to leave.

"Bettah, sah, bettah, but crying like her heart am 'most broke."

"Now, Uncle Ben, I am going away. I know I can trust you, so I shall tell you our address; it is 115 Burton street, but you must not come there, nor must you follow me now."

"Yes, sah, you can trust me, and de Lawd bless you and de young missis," turning away and wiping from his dusky cheeks the falling tears.

It was a thoroughly selfpossessed-looking man who an hour or two later stepped into the private office of Richard Connard, sole proprietor of a mammoth department store. Mr. Connard was a man of substantial girth, with a bright smile and a cheery word for all, and his pleasing personality together with his sterling qualities made him a great favorite in business and social circles.

The door was scarcely closed behind Lawrence, before Connard had him by the hand.

"Lawrence, old fellow," he exclaimed, "this is an unexpected pleasure. I have longed increasingly for your return. I want you."

Sympathy! This unnerved Lawrence Bruce. He could face Judge Sommerville without flinching, but not Richard Connard. This portly proprietor, suddenly remembering that he was neglecting some important desk work, sat down and wrote vigorously for some minutes, and then without looking up into the face he knew must be agitated, said: "It is fortunate in the extreme that you have come, Bruce. Dependable fellows are hard to find. One of my best second-floor clerks leaves next week, and I have been wondering what to do about it. It will be an accommodation to me if you can fill the vacancy, till I have something better for you."

"Mr. Connard—"

"No, Lawrence, not 'Mister.' Call me Richard, Dick, or anything you like, only not 'Mister.' We meet as we parted, friends and equals, with no formality between us."

"Oh, Richard, this is more than I can bear, but let me tell you I have forfeited the privilege of being your friend."

"No, you haven't. You are the same old chap to me, and I want to be to you. I have looked for you so long, and many times I have been on the point of sending you a message, but thought it best not to. I was sure you would come to your senses. You know the day of your discharge (that hurt me worse than it did you, Lawrence) that I told you to come back whenever you were ready to be a man. I have been expecting you ever since. I need you. Will you accept this position?"

"Richard, how can I thank you? Accept it? Of course I will, and if I could only tell you the good—"

"I understand; that's all right, but let's not talk about it. And, do forgive me, here is an advance check on your first month's salary; you know my clerks must dress well. I am busier than usual right now and cannot spare the time for the visit I am hungry to have. But you report here at my office one week from this morning. Mighty glad you came, old fellow, mighty glad; it seems like the days of 'auld lang syne.'"



CHAPTER XII

The Slippery Way

ON his way to the tailor's Mr. Bruce seemed to be walking on air.

"I thought," he mused, "that sympathy among the rich was dead and buried with honors long ago, but if so, it is reincarnated in dear Connard. I'll do my best, my very best for him, and how glad Marjorie will be! Oh, it seems good to be a man among men again!"

Night was falling before he alighted from his car at O'Conner's corner. He was tired and his head was aching most painfully. He had nearly forgotten his elation over his victory of the afternoon, thinking of his ignominious defeat of the morning. It would crush Marjorie if she knew!

"Oh, Bruce," called O'Conner. "Come here. Mrs. Gray tells me that you have enlisted under her end of the sign, and I must congratulate you. Just step in."

"No, not this evening, O'Conner."

"I'm surprised, for I supposed you'd be talking religion and nothing else, and especially if a fellow asked you to. I am interested, I really am."

"If that is it, I'll tarry for a moment certainly."

Passing into the saloon, O'Conner deliberately took

a drink, offering one at the same time to Mr. Bruce, purposely spilling some to make the odor as strong as possible.

"Don't tempt me," pitiously pleaded Mr. Bruce, as he felt his old appetite overcoming him. He weakly staggered for the door, but O'Conner intercepted him, and—well, one drink after another was the result.

The next that he clearly realized, he was at home in bed with Marjorie sitting by his side and Mrs. Gray bustling around "reddin' things up."

"Never mind, dear," said Marjorie, as she thought he was about to make some explanation, "I know how it happened. I became so frightened about you last night, that Mrs. Gray went to the saloon and found you, and was told by several there of O'Conner's base trick. She had you brought home in an ambulance."

"I remember now, but it is as a horrible dream.

He groaned and then soon fell asleep, not waking again till the last rays of the setting sun were shedding their mellow light through the room, bringing out in bold relief the pallor of his emaciated and pensive face.

"Mrs. Gray," presently he said, in a feeble voice, "bring your chair to my side and tell me whether there is any use for me to try again or not."

"I guess there ain't, Mr. Bruce."

"O God," he moaned, "is the battle lost forever this time, and is there truly no hope, just as I thought I was getting a new start in life?"

"No, no, Mr. Bruce, the battle ain't lost, and there is hope, glory!"

"But I thought you said that there is no more use for me to try."

"I did say it and mean it."

"I do not understand."

"Well, it's just this way: I heard Preacher Fairfax say once that when Esther was a wee, toddlin' girl that

he took her out for a walk one day when it was all slippery and risky.

"'Let papa take your hand, little one,' he coaxed, 'so you won't fall and get hurt.'

"'Oh, no. I can walk alone,' and away she started, but her baby feet flew out from under her and down she come. Her pride was hurt some, but she wasn't ready yet to be helped. Soon she fell ag'in, then she asked her father to let her take hold of just his little finger. He done as she said, and for a time all went well. But by and by they come to a real bad treacherous place, she lost her hold and down she went, bruisin' her soft, tender flesh. That time, with tears in her eyes, she looked straight up into his face and told him she was ready then for him to take her whole hand in his.

"'Ain't you like Esther been tryin' to walk alone, Mr. Bruce, thinkin' you was pretty strong? I guess when the Father told you to let Him have your hand, you must have thought the same as Esther, even if you didn't say it in so many words, that you was strong enough to walk alone, or at least, so to speak, by holdin' on to His little finger. But you lost your hold, didn't you? What you need now is to have the Father take your whole hand right in His."

"Perhaps I did forget, perhaps I did, for I thought my danger in that direction forever past. Like Esther, though, I slipped and fell when least expecting it. I am so tired and have no faith at all left in myself. I want the Father to lead me safely on. Do you think He will?"

"Ah, that He will, that He will, and more, too! When Preacher Fairfax and Esther was takin' that walk, they come to another place that was dangerous for the little feet, even if her father did have her hand in his. What

she needed was to be carried, and she asked him to do it. So he lifted this motherless lamb of his up into his bosom and carried her safe across. Do you s'pose she was thinkin' all the time of the slippery way and the danger of the path? Of course not. She wasn't thinkin' of her danger at all, but of her father and her safety.

"And now, Mr. Bruce, you're a man, but you ain't been a Christian long, so you are just one of the Father's tired-out, frightened lambs, don't you see? There is such a beautiful verse for you, I must read it: 'He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.' Don't that comfort you a bit? Quit thinkin' now about your fall and the dangerous, slippery way, but think instead of the Father, layin' your poor head down on His shoulder and trustin' Him to get you safe home, just as Esther did her father."

"Mrs. Gray, that is beautiful and so restful," he almost whispered, and then weary, frightened child that he was, wept for some time, scarcely knowing whether for sorrow or for joy.

"I begin to see my mistake now," at last he said. "I do not have to trust my own strength any more than did Esther, do I?"

"No, Mr. Bruce, glory! The Lord knew none of us could ever get home alone, for the way is hard and slippery for the best of us. There's another verse that says: 'Now unto Him that is able to keep you from *falling*.'"

"When Esther had that little fall, it didn't hurt her half as much as it did her father. He just felt so sorry that his baby must suffer for her disobedience. But the very minute she was willin' for him to help her, she didn't have to tease one bit. And, Mr. Bruce,

you feel awful bad about your fall, but remember your Father feels worse. He wants to help you. Have you asked Him to?"

"Yes, many times."

"And told Him you are sorry you didn't let Him hold your hand in His?"

"Yes."

"Then it's all right, for He says, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.' "

"Oh, what a tender, loving Father, Mrs. Gray!"

"Yes, ain't He? If anything, Preacher Fairfax loved Esther a tiny bit more after her fall and her comin' to him for help without any faith at all left in herself, than he did before, and so it is with your Father. He never loved you more 'n He does this very minute, remember that, and after this turn to Him for the help He wanted to give you this time."

"Ah, yes, by His grace I will. I do not want ever again to take even one little step alone, for the way is very, very rough and slippery." And, he added with a smile, sinking wearily back upon his pillow, "'He shall gather the lambs in His arm, and carry them in His bosom.' "



CHAPTER XIII

The Hero's Part

ON the appointed morning Mr. Bruce, a sad-hearted, sad-countenanced man, appeared at the private office of Richard Connard.

"Good morning, Lawrence," said the latter cordially, "it seems like old times, I must say, for you to be reporting here for business. But I fear you are not quite well. What is the matter?"

"Richard, oh, Richard," he replied brokenly, and sank wearily into a chair. "Will you believe it when I tell you that I was beastly drunk again before reaching home the other day? I am not reporting here for work as you think, but to resign, only I'll run errands, in fact I'll do anything till these clothes are paid for. It's awful—Connard, it is awful to meet defeat in the very face of victory!"

"Well, Bruce," said Mr. Connard with forced severity, "I never before thought you a coward."

"Coward! You don't know my battles."

"Yes, coward, Bruce. If you expect to live the rest of your life without meeting temptation, let me tell you right now that you are indulging a false hope. It will come, now suddenly and fiercely, now slowly and subtly, but it will come, depend upon that. The greater

the temptation met and conquered, the stronger the character becomes. But too, we rise by our victories no more truly than by our failures, if we will it so. You say you have met defeat in the face of victory, and you have, if you view it in that light. But I say you have the opportunity of becoming a man of invincible worth.

"There is hope for one who sees his danger and who fights as you have fought. Yes, yes, your way is hard, but others have battles too, and many harder than yours—harder because of the nature of them. Some things, you know, cannot be told even to the nearest friend, and it is hidden temptation and the hidden sorrow that saps the vitality the quickest. Brace up, my boy; the sun is always shining somewhere, even though it may be hard to believe it on a dark and cloudy night. I trust you, Lawrence, whether you trust yourself or not, and want you with me again. You, though five years my junior, were the chosen companion of my young manhood, and no other has ever taken in my heart the place you hold. Now the question is this: Are you going to choose the hero's part, or the coward's part, throwing away your last opportunity for advancement all because of one little temptation suddenly yielded to? The position for which there are now several applicants is still open. Will you take it?"

"Yes, I will," he answered emphatically, a new light in his eye. "By God's help and the help of a friend, I now choose the hero's part. I had not thought of it before that by conquering myself I may become a stronger man than ever. I *will* scale the heights if I fall fifty times in doing it. I am now ready to go to work."

"Good for you, old fellow, your answer contains the proper ring," slapping him encouragingly on the shoulder.

"It's settled now, Lawrence. Do not talk of the past, nor think of it morbidly. Strengthen yourself by dwelling upon the victories you are going to win.

"By the way, changing the subject, I wish you would send word to Mrs. Bruce that you have an engagement with me this evening. I want you to go with me to dinner."

"Thank you, but I have a previous engagement which I cannot break. It is with Dr. Dale."

"Dr. Dale! Dr. LeRoy Dale?"

"Yes, do you know him?"

"I rather think I do. We have been in the same club now for six years. But what about this anyhow? For a few months past he has seemed like another man, and a very uncertain quantity, always pleading more important engagements and the like.

"May I inquire as to the nature of your engagement with him?"

"To be sure. Dr. Dale has opened and personally superintends a mission on Burton street for the reclamation of such as I. Mrs. Bruce and I are to sing for him, and I am to make a very short gospel talk, my first effort along that line."

"Great Scott!" and his evident surprise was so comical that Mr. Bruce laughed more heartily than he had before in months.

"Can't you believe it, Connard?"

"Scarcely. Do enlighten me."

"Perhaps the love of God has something to do with it."

"That may be, that may be," he answered slowly and with an air of abstraction.

"But say, Lawrence," he added playfully, looking at his watch, "if you don't get to work, I'll have to dock you on your first day's time. Remember you are to begin your upward climb with a will, my boy, and are

not to let an occasional slip discourage you, much less weaken your determination to scale the heights. Don't forget that Richard Connard is your friend now just as much as he was in the old palmy days, and that your interests are his."

The two men warmly clasped hands, then the office door clicked, leaving one on the inside thinking, "Dear, brave Bruce, he will win out yet," and the other on the outside, "Dear, noble Connard, was there ever a friend more true?"

Something over two years had rolled around. The last mellow days of autumn were hovering over the earth, as though summer were loth to say goodbye.

Lawrence Bruce had been steadily advanced. He had thrown himself into business and the work of the mission with such vigor and constant application, that there was not much time for the tempter to assail him. He was not depending upon his own strength for safety, oh, no, for too well he knew the instability of that. Every morning he asked the Father just to hold his hand for that one day. The friendship between him and Richard Connard had ripened into the love of brothers. When his days of depression were upon him, or the demon of thirst was weakening the expression of determination on his well-chiseled face, it was Richard who would slip quietly by and say, "The hero's part, my boy," or tell some capital story till Lawrence was laughing heartily. It was a part of Mr. Connard's creed that a man is comparatively safe, so long as he can laugh with a pure, true ring.

About three months after entering Mr. Connard's service, for a few days Lawrence had been unusually nervous and pensively inclined. Richard was uneasy and managed to watch him closely. Late one afternoon believing himself unobserved, Lawrence slipped out, and

just as he was entering a saloon, a firm hand was laid upon his shoulder. No word of reproof was spoken by the one, nor of explanation by the other. Mr. Connard summoned a carriage and a long drive was taken through the parks, he, so he assured Lawrence, feeling the need of a little rest. That night he could not sleep, and the next morning Lawrence was called to the private office.

"Lawrence," he said, "I am working too hard. What's the use of it all? I am going on a week's hunt down in the country to see if that won't make me eat and sleep better. A vacation alone is worse than none. You must go with me, and we shall rough it in typical Indian style."

Ten days later the two men returned to the city as gay and frolicsome as boys, and thereafter Lawrence made steady gain. The upward climb was not easy at all times, but then anything easy of attainment is not often worth the effort.

Lawrence was now in a financial position to move his family to a more respectable section of the city, and it was his purpose to do so, as soon as a suitable location could be secured.

It hurt him to think of the pain it would cause faithful Mrs. Gray to give up Billy, but with smiles through her tears she had said to go. "That there child," she assured him, "don't belong to the likes of us here on Burton street."

"Wherever our future lot shall be cast, Mrs. Gray," Mr. Bruce had told her, "our home is yours when old age or infirmities compel you to give up your noble work. I shall never forget the part you have had in our salvation, both for this life and the next."

The morning was hazy, warm and beautiful, without a hint of summer's withering heat or winter's stinging cold, but Lawrence was unmindful of it all and in per-

plexity sought the privacy of his employer's office. When that door closed, shutting them in from the outer world, the formality they maintained in the presence of the small army of Mr. Connard's employes was laid aside, and they met as the dearest of friends.

"What's in the wind now, Lawrence?" he asked, still busily writing away at his desk and without looking up.

"I've been offered another position, that's all."

"What?" wheeling around in his chair to face the speaker.

"Oh, just been offered another position."

"But I have you fast. You signed a two-year contract with me only yesterday."

"So I told Dr. Dale."

"Dr. Dale again, is it; now what?"

He is planning to enlarge the work of the mission, and wants me to become the superintendent, devoting to it all my time, on a living salary, of course."

"But with no opportunity for promotion, and see what you have before you here, Lawrence. But confound Dr. Dale anyhow! It would take about two of him to make a man of my dimensions, but he succeeds in keeping things well stirred up wherever he happens to be. You aren't in here to tell me you want to accept, are you?"

"No, I am not, but some way it troubles me. For so long you have taught me to choose the hero's part, that I cannot throw this lightly aside. To be sure, I cannot accept without your sanction, I understand that, for the contract is signed. Suppose that the contract did not exist, what then ought I to do?"

"But it does exist, thank goodness! I have talked to Dr. Dale several times about this Burton street enterprise of his, but he's such a crank—says he'd rather give up the practicing of his profession than that mission. And, Lawrence, he tells me too, that you are

developing power in handling and winning the outcast. He thinks you really are remarkable. What about it? Do you enjoy working with people of that repulsive class?"

"Yes, I do, for who knows better than I their needs?"

"Forgive me, I didn't think. You always belonged where you are now though, but strayed away, that is all. And where there is one like you there are thousands of the other kind."

"Then you believe in letting the thousands go, do you?"

"Oh, no, not just that, but you are fitted for other things. Let some one less talented than you do the slum work."

"But it takes brains and money along with love to God and fellowmen to run a mission successfully, Richard. If you would only take an evening off and give us a call, you would know more about it."

"That's so, but if you do not want to accept the worthy doctor's proposition, what's the use of talking about it?"

"I hardly know, only because it is natural to come to you with every thing. Of course I am not considering it seriously for a moment. My first duty is to my family. So many of my money-making years have been wasted, that I must exert every effort now to lay up a competency for Mrs. Bruce and the boy."

"Of course," bringing his fist down upon his desk with a thud, "you must make your family first. I'll tell Dr. Dale to have the goodness to let you alone, and, incidentally, to quit meddling with my affairs. But then the contract is binding. For the novelty of it, I believe I'll attend the mission this evening, then that will give me an opportunity to have it out with the doctor."

"You are wise to stick to your post, Lawrence. Don't get worried now and carry this hero business too far."

I'm glad we fixed up our contract yesterday, for it will make it easier to get around the doctor. He is not noted for changing his mind when once it is made up. It will be unalloyed pleasure for me to give him the shocking surprise of finding out that there is at least one man in the world he cannot manage."



CHAPTER XIV

Life's Investment

THERE was a decided stir in Hope Mission that evening when a stately stranger of faultless appearance walked in, and sat down near the front. During the opening songs Mr. Connard interested himself by conjecturing as to the probable past of the poor wretches about him, but soon he forgot all in listening to Lawrence.

What was he saying? It was only a commonplace remark, in fact almost hackneyed,—that God hates the sin but loves the sinner to the point of sending His only Son to die. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Mr. Connard remembered that on the previous Sunday his pastor had said practically the same thing, clinching his statement also with that very familiar quotation from the Gospel of John. It had had no effect on him then, nor had the whole sermon for that matter. Was it the slight tremor in Lawrence’s voice that seemed to thrill him through and through with the thought of God’s matchless love? Probably, together with his tremendous earnestness. Lawrence had more than simply an intellectual belief in what he was saying,

and real conviction on the part of a speaker always makes a difference. And then too his left-hand neighbor was weeping and half mumbling to himself: "If what he says is true, it's enough to put some heart into a fellow again. It must be. If not, how account for Bruce? I've seen him lying in the gutter drunk many a time, and just look at him now. Yes, Jesus has the power."

"It is all wonderful, God's love plan," soliloquized the listener, "but some way I never realized it much before. Nothing of merely human origin could make a man like Dr. Dale, for instance, work with men of this class. The secret must be his love for souls for whom Christ died."

Mr. Connard had intended to listen intently to every word the speaker might utter, for a Gospel talk from Lawrence was a decided novelty. Much had been lost, however, because of the train of thought aroused by his first utterance in regard to God's love. Now something else was being said that found lodgment in his mind, quite erratic this evening.

"Be careful in the investment of your lives. There is so much in the world from which to choose. Seek not the good, but the best."

"New thoughts those to me—putting out one's life at interest, and letting the good alone for the best. I wonder if my life's investment is good?—the first twenty-one years put into education. Yes, that is all right, and I believe might properly be entered in the 'best' column; the last eighteen into dollars, adding to what I inherited from my father. Good? Yes, for I have been honest, my yardstick being strictly thirty-six inches long. Best? I—I'll have to think about it. What was that Lawrence said the other day about dollars for dollars' sake and dollars for others' sake?" He couldn't remember, for Lawrence was always getting off something, and so his thoughts wandered on.

One verse of "Rescue the Perishing" had been concluded before Mr. Connard was thoroughly aware that singing was going on. Then his left-hand neighbor tapped him lightly on the shoulder, crowding by and going up to the altar, weeping.

"Is he in earnest, Lawrence?" asked Mr. Connard some time later, as they together with the doctor sat down for a chat after every one else had left.

"Is who in earnest, Richard?"

"Why, the man who sat by me."

"Yes, very much in earnest. He has not always been so low, but it is the old story, drink, you know."

"So I imagined. Does he need work?"

"Yes, poor fellow, he does."

"Have you his address?"

"Yes."

"Send him around. We shall see what can be done."

"Mr. Connard," it was Dr. Dale who spoke, "I am especially desirous of being practical in this work. The spiritual part takes the preëminence of course. But I should like to establish a regular employment agency, open a reading room and gymnasium, and have clubs of various kinds organized for the betterment of these neglected people. Mr. Bruce is the man to put at the head of affairs."

"Excellent idea! I'll double the salary, Doctor, and put in dollar for dollar for the extension of the work, or that is, I mean I would, if it was not for the contract. Mr. Bruce belongs to me now for two years, and I cannot let him go. Then too, he must lay up a competency for his family, which he'd not be likely to do by giving up his present business. One's own family first. Do not ask him to do what you yourself would not."

"Very well, Mr. Connard," answered the doctor smiling peculiarly, "the matter of a superintendent does not

have to be decided immediately. Several are sharing with me the burden of this work, and we can continue yet a little longer as we are, if we must.

"I see my carriage has come, so perhaps we'd better go. I shall have to lock up tonight, for my right-hand man, or rather in this case woman, could not stay."

As the three men stepped through the door, a horrible scream issued from the saloon.

"Help! Save me! I'm being murdered!"

Recognizing the voice as being O'Conner's, Mr. Bruce without a moment's hesitation dashed in, closely followed by his friends.

There upon the floor lay the saloon-keeper with a drunken fiend on top of him, brandishing a heavy knife in mid-air, and with which he had made a number of cruel gashes about the head.

Realizing that with about one more plunge the victim would be killed, Mr. Bruce, regardless of his own danger, pushed the would-be murderer aside. The infuriated wretch with almost incredible rapidity then turned upon Mr. Bruce, burying the knife deeply in the right arm raised in self-defense. With a yell of triumph he now aimed for the heart, but in another instant was writhing upon the floor, Dr. Dale having put into execution an athletic trick of his college days. The astonished spectators obeyed the doctor as soldiers would a general, some guarding the prisoner, while others summoned the patrol and ambulance. Mr. Connard bound up Mr. Bruce's arm with handkerchiefs as well as his trembling hands would permit, and the doctor endeavored to assuage the flow of blood from O'Conner's face and neck. The whole scene was over in a few minutes, policemen having looked after their share of the prey, and O'Conner having been taken to the emergency hospital, the three men following in the doctor's carriage.

Dr. Dale was well acquainted with the hospital staff. Explanations were speedily made, O'Conner properly looked after, and the doctor proceeded to dress Mr. Bruce's arm. The gash was long, making it necessary to take several stitches.

"Does it hurt much, Lawrence?" asked Mr. Connard who had been silently but nervously watching the process."

"Not unbearably."

"You certainly chose the hero's part this time, my boy, but, oh, if that villain had killed you! I am more glad than ever now about the contract, for I cannot have you risking your life in this kind of style."

The patient was weak and in pain, and Mr. Connard excited.

"Doctor," he asked, "can't you administer an anæsthetic?"

"No, his heart will not permit of that."

"Then can't you use one locally?"

"I'll do all I dare to keep him from suffering."

"Was there disinfectant in the water in which you washed your hands, Doctor?"

"Yes."

"Pardon me, but is that water you are using sterilized?"

"Yes."

"And the needle?"

"Yes. If you will feel any better to have the patient himself disinfected, medicated and sterilized, I'll turn him over to you and take notes on the process for the benefit of my profession at large."

"How facetiously inclined you are, Doctor. Does it go with your malady? I heard some time ago that you are growing childish over the mission and your foster daughter."

"Indeed! Then I wish I had grown childish long

ago. But if I am making no mistake in my diagnosis, you have the malady in its incipency yourself. It's incurable."

Only a part of the time did Mr. Bruce pay much heed to the good-natured bantering of his friends. He was thinking of that other barroom tragedy, and how thankful he was that Marjorie was not the victim this time. Why had God twice now spared him almost miraculously, and why was he developing so much power in winning the outcast to the right? Was God really calling him to give up the business he so much liked, and to the superintendency of the mission? Well, if so, He would make it plain, for Marjorie had said He would.

"Will Mr. Bruce have to spend the night here, Doctor?" questioned Mr. Connard.

"No, it is not necessary. We shall see him home, but first I must inquire about O'Conner."

Five minutes later he reported that the wounds were serious, but probably not fatal.

Mr. Connard and the doctor accompanied Mr. Bruce to his now well-furnished rooms to explain the situation to Mrs. Bruce, and to assure her that there was no occasion for alarm.

"Remember, Lawrence," said Mr. Connard in leaving, "that you are not to report for work again till that arm is well."

The doctor and Mr. Connard had ridden for several blocks in silence.

"Mr. Connard," finally spoke the doctor, "that affair tonight unnerved me more than men of my profession are supposed to be unnerved. I indulged in far more jocularities than I felt, just to conceal from Mr. Bruce my real feeling."

"Yes, I understand. The same spirit took possession of me also."

"But noble, heroic Bruce," said the doctor, "heroic

in more ways than one! He is a wonderful man. I believe God has spared him for a purpose."

"Do you think so? I presume you refer to the mission?"

"Yes."

"I do not want to be a hindrance to anything that is right. We'll see what develops from this night's experience, before making rash promises.

"I wish I had a better investment for my own life, Doctor. Some way I am depressed, and my mode of living seems so empty. Now the good Bruce accomplished just this one evening is worthy of a lifetime. But then he is so gifted and capable in many lines. Is there no one else you can get to take his place in the work?"

"Is there no one else you can get to take his place in *your* work?"

"Emphatically no."

"Then it's dollars against human lives and immortal souls, isn't it? Either you or I shall have to give up. I'd not have a man at the head of this mission incapable of taking care of himself and not wanted anywhere else. Bruce is the man, and, Mr. Connard, I believe God is calling you to the work too."

"Calling me to the work? You are mistaken. Calling me to give up my business? If the life of every man in the city depended on it, I could not talk as Lawrence did this evening. Oh, no, God is not calling me. You certainly are very much mistaken for once, Doctor."

"Who said anything about your giving up your business, or making Gospel talks?"

"I thought—but maybe I misunderstood you. In what sense do you consider me called? I'd like to do something yet, if I could, I really would; my life is so useless. Yours, for instance, is worth the living; you have a definite and unselfish aim. My religion up to

date has been of the selfish type, I fear. When I take time for an introspection of my heart, I find therein the peace of God from which I would not part for the world. But having no family of my own, it has never occurred to me that I owe any special duty to others. Tell me what you mean."

"You are particularly gifted as a business man, Mr. Connard, and can make more honest cash in a day than many in a year. God did not give you your talent to be wasted. Mr. Bruce has marked business ability too, I admit, but possesses a power over the fallen quite impossible for you or for me ever to acquire. Keeping him tied down to his present daily routine is good, but not his best, using his own idea. It is in the mission that he excels. To take you from your store and me from my office and place us permanently in the mission would hinder the development of our highest talents. God made you into a business man and me into a professional man. Let us stay where we belong, and at the same time not hinder Bruce from entering his particular sphere. There is not another man in my acquaintance who can equal him in this work.

"Some months ago a potent change came into my life, Mr. Connard. I just gave myself, my profession and all I am or have into the hands of God. Since then I have had my first real joy, and have gotten infinitely more pleasure out of money-making. I like it now better than ever before—not for the sake of the money itself, but for what I can do with it."

"Do you imply that you give it all away?"

"Not by any means. I spend a great deal on my family, believing it to be my duty as a Christian man to support them according to the station they fill. The idea is this, Mr. Connard: Whether I am spending money on myself, my family, or others, I do it with a subconsciousness of God's approval. But I am

systematic in my benevolences, giving away a certain percentage of my income."

"Doctor, you surprise me. Consecration and common-sense can go hand in hand, can't they?"

"Yes, and when they do not, there is something lacking with the one or the other. It is a serious mistake to confuse consecration with fanaticism. I think you see now what I mean. God is calling you to His work in the sense that He is asking you henceforth to consecrate your life and business to Him. If, as you intimated this evening, you are willing to join forces with me in the development of the mission, see what it will mean. Mr. Bruce cannot exercise his best talent unless we do ours, thereby making it possible for us to supply him with the cash. It is business and religion, but the two united are one. God gave us common-sense and expects us to use it. As to his family, we can give him a good salary which he will earn, every penny of it. The only drawback I see is that that boy of his must be gotten out of this section of the city. He cannot be neglected for the sake of some other man's boy. It will make it a little harder for Mr. Bruce, but after all no one thinks anything of it for a man in purely secular business to live miles away."

"Dr. Dale," and Mr. Connard spoke with much feeling, "your little talk has done me more good than all the sermons I ever heard in my life. It never occurred to me that my money-making ability is a direct gift from God. I'm going to make more than ever now if I can, but with a different object in view. I now understand you through and through, Doctor, but for months you have been, I must say, a complete enigma. I—I think—but, of course, I told you that the contract is signed. I'll see what Mr. Bruce has to say. If he wants to do it, but then he doesn't, perhaps I can arrange some way to give him up. It would be hard,

though, very, very hard. You see Lawrence and his family are all I have in the world to love or to love me. Whatever is best for them I want done. But you know just as well as I do that, if they give themselves wholly to this work, they will save nothing from a salary if we should pay a thousand dollars a month. He and his wife are alike when it comes to a matter of this kind. And that boy of theirs, the brightest child I ever saw. His interests must not be overlooked. He must be educated and ought to have an inheritance, but,—well, of course, I'll have to leave my money to some one.

"Here's my hotel, Doctor. I thank you. I must think this all out clearly before a definite decision is reached."

"Good night, Mr. Connard, I think you have now found your life's investment and are starting a bank account in heaven."

"Good night, and I thank you once more."



CHAPTER XV

Decision

THE third morning after the tragedy Mr. Connard called for Mr. Bruce, taking him to the hospital to inquire after O'Conner.

"Oh, yes, he is very ill," replied the nurse in answer to Mr. Bruce's question, "but we are hopeful. From what I heard of the affair he came nearly being murdered, but in his attacks of delirium he imagines that he himself is the murderer, trying to kill some one with a bottle. And then he says over and over, 'I wish I hadn't, I wish I hadn't.' Sometimes I think maybe there is a chapter back in his life somewhere that he is confusing with present events. He seems to be worrying, too, about a certain drink he once overpowered a man into taking."

"May we see him?" asked Mr. Bruce earnestly.

"I think it will do no harm if you do not stay long."

"Do you know me, Mr. O'Conner?" Mr. Bruce asked gently, stepping up to his bed.

"Is it you, Bruce?"

"Yes."

"I thought you were dead."

"No, I am very much alive and so glad that you are no worse than you are."

"But I tried to kill you once."

"You didn't succeed. That is all in the past now, and it is not necessary to talk about it."

"I hurt your wife though cruelly."

"Yes, but she is well and sent you these," placing a bunch of beautiful red roses in his hand.

"How good they smell! Tell her I thank her."

"And I took advantage of you once, Bruce, and made you drink."

"Never mind that either. I have never tasted a drop since."

"But what happened the other night? What made you do it? I have deliberately plotted against you and yours many times, and then you risked your life to save me."

"O'Conner," and Mr. Bruce spoke softly while his eyes shone with tender and beautiful light, "did you ever hear of the Nazarene who gave His life for His enemies?"

"Yes, yes, long ago. My mother prayed to Him, but I have almost forgotten."

"I have let Him into my life, O'Conner, that explains all. He has now taken from me my craving for drink and also my hatred for you. Otherwise I should not have gone to the rescue."

"Is it possible, is it possible?" said the sick man meditatively, "but I am too far gone in sin myself to be helped, and may die of my injuries anyhow. But the poor fellows! I never thought of it till I have been lying here on my back. Do all you can for them, Bruce; they need you."

"You must talk no more now," said Mr. Bruce, catching the nurse's warning glance. "It is all right; we are friends henceforth regardless of the past, and may God bless you."

Mr. Bruce had stepped from Mr. Connard's carriage,

but the latter did not order his driver on. He did not speak for two or three minutes, twirling his moustache meditatively, then he began suddenly:

"That contract, Lawrence, I have been thinking about it. Do you wish it did not exist?"

"For your sake, no, Richard; for the sake of these poor creatures, yes. My lifetime will be all too short for me to prove to you the gratitude I feel for all you have done for me. I have not *scaled* the heights; the man at the top put a rope around me and pulled me up. My first allegiance is to him."

"Oh, bother, Lawrence! and what's the matter with your figure of speech? You usually speak more elegantly than that. Now for me that would be truly a classical expression, but not for you. What were you going to say about these poor people?"

"They are on my heart day and night, and I find myself constantly planning how they might be benefited, Richard. See those two little girls down there in that filthy gutter now, because they have no better place to play. I'd like to fit up a playground for the children if I could. Their lives are so empty of joy."

"What a grand idea! Queer that no one has done something of the kind before, the need is so apparent. I've greatly enlarged the toy department only recently, you know. Give this money to those babies down there and tell them to get some candy."

"Of course, you understand that it—I refer to the contract—is legal and binding, but,—well, you do seem to be the only one who knows how to meet the needs of these people, and the only one to whom they turn. I'll not stand in your way, Lawrence. I scarcely see how I can get along without you—I won't get along without you, now that's settled," bringing his first down for emphasis. "When you become superintendent of the mission, I'm going to have a hand in it too—do some

more of the rope-holding act, if you please. For some reason my life perspective is all becoming changed. Last evening I never once thought of that confounded club till eleven o'clock, and my presence presumably was indispensable too. I can't say much, but just go ahead, my boy, and God bless you. I have ordered a new set of entries in the books to the account of the Lord. For the life of me I cannot see how so much good sense got into that small head of Dr. Dale's. Systematic business principles ought, of course, to enter into one's religion."

Mr. Bruce stood watching the carriage till it turned the corner, wondering what Mr. Connard may have meant. That afternoon he found out in part when the mail brought to him the contract with the signature torn off.

Mrs. Gray was in an ecstasy of delight over Mr. Bruce's report concerning O'Conner, and could scarcely wait till the next morning when she in company with Mr. Bruce might also see him.

"He has steadily improved since you were here yesterday," said the nurse to Mr. Bruce. "Yes, it will be all right for you to see him again, but please do not stay long. Excitement or fatigue might bring up his fever."

O'Conner warmly clasped the hand of his rescuer, and then cast a half-startled, half-amused look toward Mrs. Gray.

"How'd do, O'Conner," she said sitting down by his bed, "I'm dreadful glad to see you here, I must say."

"Thanks, awfully!"

"Yes, for now you have time to think. When we won't let the Lord's mercy turn us from our sins, He is very likely to allow trouble of some kind, though I know He don't want to. It's just the same as a mother punishin' her naughty child. She'd lots rather love it

into doin' right, but when it won't let her, she ain't dischargin' her duty if she don't punish it."

"I don't believe the Lord or anybody else loves me, Mrs. Gray."

"Yes, He does. What you really mean is that *you* don't love the Lord or anybody. It was *sinners* that God loved, or He'd never sent His Son to die. I guess you're a sinner, ain't you?"

"I guess I am."

"Then God loves you; that's settled. Now comin' down to human bein's, I think it come mighty near bein' love that made Mr. Bruce here risk his life to save you, don't you?"

"Y-e-s, I'll take it back, Mrs. Gray, and I am sorry I was so mean to you about the mission."

"Well, if you're sorry, I'm glad; it's a sign that God's love is workin' in your heart. Just let Him have His own way, O'Conner, and come back to the mission ag'in. I expect I was pretty hasty in orderin' you out."

"Not a bit of it; I needed kicking out."

"O'Conner," spoke Mr. Bruce, "I have what I trust you will consider good news. Last evening Dr. Dale and Mr. Connard came to see me, and arrangements were made whereby I shall take full charge of the mission. The new order of things will be informally opened a few nights hence, and I trust you will be able to attend. Come, if you are well enough."

"I will, Bruce, and thank you. Do you think there really is any hope for such a wretch as me?" he added wistfully.

"As long as our Saviour is in heaven, O'Conner, and He has a follower on earth, there is hope for any man."

A moment of silence ensued, when O'Conner, smiling grimly through his bandages, spoke to Mrs. Gray:

"I have learned from experience that there is no use to try to get ahead of you, and have decided at

last to hang out my flag of truce,—that is, if the devil doesn't get into me as soon as I am out of here."

"What kind of flag is that? The Stars and Stripes is the only kind I know anything about; I generally have one in my Bible for a book mark."

"Well, then I mean if I can find honest work, I'll take down my end of the sign and give yours a trial. I believe I'll like it better."

"Oh, glory, glory, O'Conner! This is the very minute I've been prayin' for ever since we begun runnin' in competition."

The nurse thinking there was likely to be some excitement, gave the signal and the guests departed, Mr. Bruce saying to the patient:

"Come right to me, O'Conner, the day you are out of here, and we shall see what can be done. A part of my new work will be to try to find employment for those who are in earnest about wanting to lead clean, respectable lives."



CHAPTER XVI

The Implacable Judge

UNCLE Ben had been up since three o'clock in the morning running hither and thither executing the judge's stern commands, for Mrs. Sommerville was lying very ill.

It was yet early when the doctor arrived. During the examination of the patient the judge paced restlessly up and down the hall, casting occasional furtive glances through the open door, if, perchance, he might read favorable news in the countenance of the keen-eyed physician.

"Oh, Mas'r Sommerville," said Uncle Ben, meeting him at the head of the stairway, "fo'give me, fo'give me. It am 115 Burton street, oh, I said I wouldn't tell."

"Silence, you nigger! Don't you know that they never are to be mentioned under this roof?"

The old darkey made no reply, but drew a trembling black hand across his eyes.

In time Dr. Dale joined the judge, asking for a private interview. Descending the stately stairs, they entered the somber though elegant library, which contained many hundreds of volumes and also some rare paintings. The doctor was too well accustomed to luxury to pay

any heed to his surroundings, but as he seated himself in a carved mahogany chair, his eye chanced to rest upon the picture of a beautiful child. Surprise and perplexity were mingled upon his face, but he did not speak. He arose, however, and crossed the room that he might the better study the portrait, his movement evidently greatly annoying the judge who exclaimed:

"Doctor, this is no time to become entranced with pictures! Tell me what you think of my wife. Is she going to get well, or is she going to die?"

"If you wish to know the true state of affairs, Judge Sommerville," replied the doctor deliberately, and still scanning the portrait, "your wife cannot live. There is a mystery in the situation. She is dying literally of a broken heart, pleading constantly for her daughter, but is too ill to make any coherent explanation. If her mind were at rest, she might live a few hours longer, but I shall not be surprised if she goes tonight."

The judge listened without outward emotion, but his thin drawn face grew deathly white. Seeing that he was not going to speak, the doctor continued:

"Pardon me if I ask if you have a daughter."

"I have."

"I did not know that. Is it possible for you to send for her?"

"It is not possible," came the answer, in a cold unnatural voice.

"I do not wish to press the matter unduly, but is this your daughter's portrait?"

The judge looked at him quickly and searchingly and then answered: "It is my daughter."

"Is she dead?"

"No, or rather, yes—dead to me."

"I am not questioning you through idle curiosity, but have two objects in view; I want if possible that the clos-

ing hours of my patient's life shall be peaceful ones. From her disjointed utterances, your reticence, the street number I overheard mentioned in the hall, and this charming picture, certainly the bud of the full blown flower I have the honor of knowing, I suspect that you are estranged from your daughter. Putting all evidence together, I deduct the conclusion that I know her. If the woman I have in mind is your daughter, let me tell you, sir, that you have very just reason to be proud of her and her family. I know both her and her husband well, but am not acquainted with much of their history. I refer to Mr. and Mrs. Bruce—Lawrence and Marjorie Bruce."

The mystery at least so far as identity was concerned was elucidated, the doctor having no further need of questioning on that point.

The old gentleman bowed his head upon his hands and groaned aloud, speaking over and over the name of his daughter which for years he had so strenuously avoided uttering.

"Judge," continued the doctor very kindly, sitting down in a chair by his side, "I do not ask you to unveil the past. It hurts me to have asked you so many leading questions, but I trust good may come of it. For more than two years your son-in-law has worked at Connard's on a good salary, and is steadily advancing with every prospect of reaching the top. He has just left—"

"Always Lawrence's way! no dependence whatever in that fellow!"

"I was about to say that he has left for a better position, better in some respects, more salary and an opportunity for doing a vast amount of good."

"Lawrence Bruce do good? Preposterous!"

The doctor paid no heed to the sneer, but in detail

told the story of the mission, Mr. Bruce's rescue, his power over the fallen, his heroism in saving the saloon-keeper's life, and outlined their plans for the future.

By degrees the judge's face softened, till he evidenced real interest. His hungry heart drank in every word, but especially anything having to do with Marjorie or her boy.

The judge's personality defied analysis. He was a combination of passion,—usually controlled, superciliousness, tenderness and love, the former qualities having for so long predominated, that no one but his wife and Uncle Ben remembered that the latter existed. He was preëminently a shrewd, cold, hard-headed professional man of the world, successful, if wealth, position, honor and power be a criterion, but to himself he was forced to admit, scornfully to be sure, that "failure" would be the only appropriate inscription for his tomb. From the day that he had preëmtorily ordered from his home his daughter and her husband till this present morning, no one had broken through the icy barrier of his repellent dignity.

Dr. Dale was keen himself with too broad a knowledge of human nature to think that the external in the judge represented more than a part of the real man. Because of this and a genuine love he had for the Bruces, he laid aside his innate sense of refinement and delicacy long enough to storm the fort of the judge's iron will, using for weapons very direct and personal questions.

Not wishing to lose an iota of the vantage ground already gained by prolonging conversation, the doctor arose to leave, saying:

"I am going to see Mr. Bruce this morning to complete a few more of our business arrangements, and shall be happy to deliver any message you may wish to send to him or to Mrs. Bruce."

The judge for a moment did not speak, his hand clutching convulsively the arm of his chair, while his superb diamond scintillated beautifully in the sunlight. At last, catching his breath laboriously between words, he said:

"If it will prolong Mrs. Sommerville's life, tell Marjorie to come."

"Only Marjorie?"

"And her son."

"No one else?"

"No!"

"Then I am sorry to tell you that Mrs. Sommerville must die with her wish ungratified. Mrs. Bruce, as much as I know her sensitive heart must be longing for her mother, will not come without her husband. She is too loyal a wife for that. Good morning, Judge. I shall call again this evening, unless in the meantime I receive word that my patient is gone."

The doctor was immensely disappointed over the result of his interview. The attitude of the father was disgusting and at the same time pitiable. Mental suffering was depicted in his every look and motion, but evidently he preferred the nursing of his pride and real or imaginary wrongs to the life of his faithful and devoted wife. Had the daughter been sent for months before, or better still, never disinherited, the mother might now be a well and happy woman. The more he thought of it the more indignant did he become. He felt that it would be practically impossible for him to meet Mr. Bruce according to appointment without his perturbation revealing more than was best. Consequently he sent a message canceling the engagement till the early evening, and saying that Dr. Fairfax would conduct the mission meeting.

The twilight was falling when Dr. Dale entered the Bruce apartments. Painfully plain indeed were the

furnishings compared to his own, but the touch of Marjorie's artistic fingers was everywhere apparent, leaving nothing which might grate upon a nature, even though as æsthetic as the little doctor's. He looked upon the home scene with mingled emotions, feeling sure if only that pertinacious father were there, he would surrender unconditionally. Marjorie was sitting by the piano, with Lawrence at her side, where she had been trying some new music, and was looking really girlish in her simple white dress. The piano was a present from "Uncle" Richard to William.

Billy, as happy as a boy could be, with a book in hand, was lost in an adventurous but wholesome tale.

Mr. Bruce had just finished telling that they were about to rent a pretty little house out a few miles on a direct car line, with a lawn and trees and flowers all about it, when some one appeared at the door.

"De Lawd be praised, honey, de Lawd be praised!" and before they had time to recover from their astonishment, Uncle Ben had Marjorie by the hand.

"Oh, come quick, come quick," he said in a choking voice, "fo' der ain't no time to lose."

"Uncle Ben," entreated Marjorie, "do tell me why you are here. Did—oh, has my father sent for me?"

"He sure has, honey, but do come quick, fo' she's dyin'!"

"Who is dying?—not my mother."

"Yes, and de Lawd help yo'. Mas'r Sommerville am 'most crazy. And you come too, Mas'r Lawrence," reading the question on his face, "fo' he sent fo' you and de boy. And come along wid you right away, I say, der ain't no time to lose. De carriage am waitin'."

As in a dream Marjorie made a few hasty preparations, the doctor improving the opportunity to explain to Lawrence a little more of the situation. Having intended to call at the Sommervilles as soon as he should

leave the Bruces, the doctor accepted Lawrence's invitation to accompany them. They rode in silence, save for Uncle Ben's nervous and frequent ejaculations, each wrapped in deep and conflicting thought.

The judge evidently had impatiently been awaiting their arrival, for he heard their approach and himself opened the door. Neither Marjorie nor Lawrence took the initiative, for they were not quite certain as to the degree of their welcome. The judge betrayed the surprise he felt in their appearance. Notwithstanding his conversation with the doctor, he persisted in thinking that they must of course bear the stamp of the slums. He scanned them closely, seemingly at a loss how to proceed, and the doctor began to fear for the outcome.

Billy comprehended something of the situation. He recognized the judge, and he it was who broke the silence. Slipping up to the old gentleman's side, and looking him in the face, he said:

"Grandpa, I thank you for letting me off when I stole the bread, and I've never stolen anything since."

The effect was magical. The judge clasped him in his arms, saying, "My grandson," and then turning to the others, "My daughter and my son!"

The doctor feeling that the moment was too sacred for the presence of a stranger, silently stole upstairs to the chamber of his patient. He found her almost gone, but rational. Would the shock of meeting her daughter be more than she could bear? He anticipated that it might, but he could not endure the thought of her entering the mysterious realm of the dead without first beholding the face, the absence of which had brought her to this hour. What was done must be done quickly. He descended to the hall in time to see the judge kiss the upturned face of Marjorie, and to place a hand warmly upon Lawrence's shoulder.

"Mrs. Bruce," said the doctor, "be very brave for her

sake, but your mother cannot live an hour. Come at once."

The little party entered the room, Marjorie alone approaching the bed and remarkably self-possessed.

"My mother, I have come!"

"My daughter, my Marjorie! I can now go in peace."

The dying woman feasted her eyes upon the lovely form bending over her, then closed them for the last on this earth, a heavenly smile relieving the lines of anguish upon her marble face.

The next few days passed by as such days always do, with the stricken family feeling that they were called upon to do and to bear the impossible.

It was the evening after the funeral and Lawrence was restless. He could not tell whether Marjorie's father expected them to remain or not, and for this reason could formulate no plans. He was reclining rather listlessly upon a couch, when Uncle Ben summoned him to the judge's presence in the library. The altered appearance of the judge was most apparent. The old, hard expression was gone, sadness, love and almost dependence being in the ascendency.

"My son," he said, "sit down here by my side. Dr. Dale has told me all he knows of your story, and I am proud of you—proud of my heroic son. If you can forget the cruel past, I will do all I can to make amends, though that is not much. I had willed all my property away to various public institutions, but destroyed the writings just before you came in. Should I follow my dear wife even this very night, all I have would belong to Marjorie. I am alone in the world now, Lawrence, save for you and your family, and am unworthy, I know, of the favor I am about to ask. Make this your future home. It will kill me, if you refuse. I shall not interfere with your plans in connection with the mission, providing William is reared in the proper atmos-

phere. Keep him away from his former environments whether you accede to my wishes or not. This is only about a thirty-minute car ride from Burton street, and my carriages shall ever be at your command. After my death, if you wish to move elsewhere, of course, do it. But now I cannot be separated from Marjorie. Tell me what you will do."

A tumult was raging in Lawrence's breast. Could he ever feel entirely easy in the judge's presence? He doubted it. But then Marjorie was the only child, so was not her duty with her father? He was not at all sure on that point, for had not the father forfeited all claim on her? Then there was Billy. His highest good after all was the one thing to be considered. Would the imperious grandfather be in any way a hindrance to him? What should he answer? The moment was crucial. The grandfather was altered, that was evident, in fact his implacability seemed entirely gone. Would it last, or was it only temporary? Was it now, honestly, Lawrence asked himself sharply, Marjorie and Billy for whom he was concerned, or himself? Now that he began analyzing his own feelings microscopically, was not the real stumbling-block the thought of sharing their love with another? He was forced to admit that it was, and also that the past was still rankling in his soul. He was surprised and disgusted. He a Christian, superintendent-elect of an important mission, harboring an unforgiving spirit toward this heart-crushed old man, and too selfish to share with him the love of wife and child! Monstrous! He seemed to hear Richard's voice saying, "The hero's part, my boy," but was it the hero's part he was called upon to choose, or only the part of a dutiful son? It was settled. He would not look upon it as a sacrifice.

His voice betrayed nothing of the inward struggle as he said:

"Father, the favor is all on my side. Gladly do I make this my home, and how I thank you for lifting from my beloved Marjorie the one remaining cloud on her life. I hope that in my son, your namesake, you will find some reparation for the great wrong I did you in taking from you your daughter, and that your declining years shall know nothing but peace and happiness."

The judge would have wept, had not his fountain of tears gone dry long ago. As it was he only said: "God bless you, my son."



CHAPTER XVII

"Three Cheers for the Other End of the Sign!"

THERE was a flutter akin to excitement in the Burton street Hope Mission, for the evening had arrived when its future policy should be announced and a permanent superintendent installed.

That afternoon Mrs. Gray had arranged and rearranged the palms and cut flowers at least a dozen times before the effect was to her liking, and straightened the mottoes and wielded the broom and dust cloth till she was genuinely tired.

She had returned early for the service to make a final inspection, and was now talking with Mr. Bruce during the arrival of the people.

"I'm awful glad," she said, "that you've got at last where you belong, and that it ain't turnin' your head away from us folks here on Burton street and the work the Lord called you to. I thought the jedge seemed mighty interested-like in Billy the time he was up for takin' the bread, and now it's all explained."

Mr. Bruce noticed that the mentioning of Billy's name caused a tremor of the speaker's lips and a mist to fill her eyes. His heart was touched.

"Mrs. Gray," he said kindly, "remember what I told you, that our home is to be your home whenever you

wish to come, and in the meantime you will be a welcome and, I trust, frequent guest."

This sent the tears coursing down her cheeks in rapid succession.

"But he won't want me."

"Yes, he will."

"No, he won't."

"Why?"

"I sassed him."

With difficulty Mr. Bruce suppressed a smile and then continued:

"But the judge does want you. He remembers you well, and asked me to say to you that he wishes to be honored by sheltering under his roof his grandson's first friend."

"Do tell!"

"Yes, and Billy is already homesick to see you. Tomorrow afternoon a carriage will be sent to take you out to dinner. This special invitation is primarily from Billy, but closely seconded by his grandfather who now recognizes no household law but the laddie's will."

"Thank you, Mr. Bruce," wiping her eyes, "but, say, ain't Billy and his ma goin' to be here tonight?"

"No, they are not. You see the judge has only very recently passed through a deep trial, and the doctor says it will require the utmost precaution to prevent a nervous collapse. As much as Mrs. Bruce would like to be present, she feels that right now her duty is at home. We have noted some improvement in her father today, so we are hopeful."

"Oh, glory for all and everything!" she said softly, as Mr. Bruce left to take his seat on the platform.

The room was full now, and with much interest he surveyed his audience. There were many present with bloated and sin-stained faces, some of them without doubt hopeless cases, but the victories of the past gave

courage for the future. O'Conner with bandaged head was there, and had whispered as Mr. Bruce passed by:

"Mr. Connard sent word not to bother you about finding me work, for he needs another deliveryman just as soon as I am well."

The service was simple and informal. After the first hearty songs Dr. Fairfax made a prayer, setting Lawrence Bruce apart to the sacred work to which he had been called, and Richard wondered what made the tears trickle down his own cheeks.

Then Dr. Dale explained that the mission room would be open by day as well as by night henceforth, and that all who wanted help on any line should call. When Mr. Bruce was not present an able assistant would be. Special provision had been made with a number of business men by a "friend" whose name must be withheld, whereby at least temporary employment could be furnished to a comparatively large number. Club rooms would be opened as soon as possible, a playground for the children laid out and a Sunday-school organized.

What he considered the best news of all he had kept for the last. The next door saloon had been rented and a reading room would be opened in the near future.

"Glory to God!" exclaimed Mrs. Gray.

In the hush of surprise which followed this announcement, O'Conner arose.

"I can't talk much," he said, "and it ain't necessary. You fellows all know there is a change in me, or I'd never have allowed this, and my end of the sign is down forever. All in line now, boys, and three cheers for the other end!"

The uproar was deafening, and probably shocking to any who did not understand the circumstances, but from the hearts of the leaders ascended fervent praise to God for this great victory and all it should mean.

Several testimonies to God's goodness and faithfulness

followed, mostly from converts of the mission, and the bells of heaven were all set a-ringing for very joy.

With a fervor not often equaled, the beautiful hymn was sung while angels paused to listen:

God is love, His mercy brightens
All the path by which we rove;
Bliss He wakes and woe He lightens,
God is wisdom, God is love!

Time and change are busy ever;
Man decays and ages move;
But His mercy waneth never;
God is wisdom, God is love!

E'en the hour that darkest seemeth
Will His changeless goodness prove;
From the gloom His brightness streameth,
God is wisdom, God is love!

He with earthly cares entwineth
Hope and comfort from above;
Everywhere His glory shineth;
God is wisdom, God is love!

AFTERWORD TO "ROSA'S QUEST"

Readers of "Burton Street Folks" will naturally be interested in the author's earlier and deservedly popular story entitled, "Rosa's Quest." It is offered at the same price as this volume—15 cents, in paper covers; 35 cents, in cloth covers.

Miss Wright's "Afterword" to "Rosa's Quest" is as follows:

One bitterly cold December day, while riding in a street car in a large city, a frail-looking little girl, bending beneath the weight of a huge package, entered the car, sitting directly in front of me. She was thinly, though neatly, clad. Her pale face was overshadowed by an expression of care far too old for her baby shoulders, while her eyes were large, dark, and pathetically wistful.

There was something irresistible about her whole appearance, impelling me to cross the aisle and sit down by her side.

She told me that her name was Rosa, and the conversation which followed, suggested the story, "ROSA'S QUEST."

I asked her if she knew anything about Jesus. To this she replied:

"Not much, ma'am, but it seems like I've heard just a little."

Of heaven and the way of salvation she was as ignorant as a child in the wilds of Africa. The sad expres-

sion of her face did not alter till I quoted John 3:16, then looking up with a smile, she said:

"Ain't that pretty?"

For some time we talked, her hungry soul eagerly drinking in the old, old story, but to her so new.

Suddenly she left the car, and with a sense of deep depression, I saw her disappear amid a great, seething mass of humanity.

If she has not succumbed to the hardships of poverty, she probably is still toiling on in that proud "Christian" city, and has any one taught her more of Jesus than she knew that day?

Who will be responsible for these lost souls, constantly coming into contact with those who profess to know the Lord?

Why is it that so many Christians view life from an inverted standpoint, attaching apparently vastly more importance to the few brief years spent upon this earth, than to the countless cycles of eternity? Why not view it normally, making our one business that of serving that blessed Christ?

Surely the saddest word in a Christian's vocabulary is indifference. By and by many a one would doubtless gladly forfeit ten thousand years of heavenly bliss just to recall the wasted opportunities of this day.

It is an incomparable privilege to be a child of the King, and the only way in which one may prove his appreciation and loyalty is by the degree of consecration and quality of service rendered.

At the day of Christ's appearing there will be many an unrewarded Christian, saved eternally by the precious blood of God's sacrificial Lamb, but with no glittering starry crown to cast at those once-pierced and bleeding feet!

If the reading of this little story draws any nearer to the Lord, influencing them to become more diligent in their search for the lost, it shall accomplish that whereunto it is prayerfully sent.

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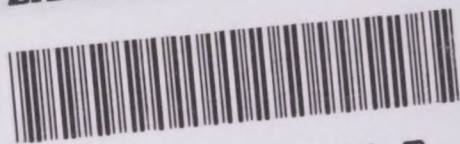
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